



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Fiscal Years 2022–2026 Strategic Plan

# Message from the Secretary

The scholar and novelist Ralph Ellison once wrote, “Education is all a matter of building bridges.” As we enter a new era of possibility for our nation, education is the critical bridge to America’s recovery, and it is foundational to our rebuilding and resiliency efforts. From prekindergarten through postsecondary learning, education has the power to lift communities, draw people together, strengthen our democracy, drive our economy, and meet our nation’s vast potential. That is why the Department of Education (Department) and entire Biden–Harris Administration are committed to a long-term agenda that ensures every student receives what they need to thrive in school and pursue their vision of success—this is what this Strategic Plan seeks to achieve.

The Department has an opportunity and responsibility to support states, districts, teachers, school leaders, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) in delivering on America’s promise of high-quality, equitable, and accessible education. As an educator myself, I take this charge seriously as I consider our policy and programmatic imperatives and their impact on all learners.

As the nation continues to reemerge from the pandemic, I am proud that the unprecedented resources provided through the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* are enabling districts, schools, and IHEs to not only recover and rebuild systems and supports to make this vision of an excellent, equitable education for all a reality but also help each student achieve academic success, including closing the gap from pandemic learning loss. Resources from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund and the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund are helping schools and colleges invest in the academic, social, emotional, and mental health resources that our students need and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic that, if left unaddressed, would continue longstanding inequities that we, at the Department, seek to eliminate. Addressing these inequities will help ensure that we meet and exceed the Department’s mission to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

I deeply believe that the Department is—and must function as—a service agency.

To fulfill this mission, we must work each day to meet the needs of every learner, and we must establish an inclusive and actionable agenda by hearing directly from those we serve: students, including student loan borrowers; teachers; parents and families; and their communities. That is one reason I have prioritized traveling across the country to listen to and learn from Americans in small, rural towns; suburban centers; and our largest cities. It is also why I will continue to ensure that our Department builds policy that centers the voices and experiences of our constituents.

This fiscal year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Strategic Plan reflects this commitment to service, equity, community building, and high-quality service standards for all our internal and external activities as well as President Biden’s vision, which I share, of an excellent education system for all.

Equity is a cross-cutting priority integrated into every goal, objective, and strategy within the FY 2022–FY 2026 Strategic Plan. That is because the Department is committed to ensuring every student receives a high-quality education. We believe that all students—regardless of background or circumstance—need and deserve access to educational opportunity, including the resources, supports, and inclusive learning environments that will set them on pathways to succeed in school and in life.

This work to positively impact and engage students begins early, which is reflected in the Administration’s deep commitment to universally accessible, high-quality prekindergarten rooted in development-focused learning. It is also why the Department will continue its significant investments in effective programs that reach infants and toddlers. Moving forward, we also will champion and work toward fully inclusive, high-quality early learning that reaches students who have been most underserved, including students with disabilities and students of color, in all communities across the country.

We will continue to prioritize equity and belonging by supporting students and educators in communities most in need and strengthening the continuum from prekindergarten through grade 12 and beyond, including career pathways, higher education, and the workforce. We also will support educators to accelerate students’ learning and provide equitable access to high-quality programs and resources to ensure students thrive, no matter their zip code. And in all this work, this Strategic Plan will help guide the Department in providing educators and schools with the tools and resources to ensure students most impacted by the pandemic make strong academic progress and are able to succeed.

In higher education, we will work to improve completion rates and build a higher education system that is more affordable, promotes equitable opportunity and upward mobility, and ensures our postsecondary education efforts create pathways to emerging and growing industries and sectors. In doing this work, we will leverage education to meet the needs of the 21st century and our globally competitive economy.

We know that a high-quality education begins with excellent educators and administrators, and we support their in-service training and professional development throughout their careers. Through the work in this Strategic Plan, the Department will meet the President’s call to strengthen the educator pipeline by diversifying the field, supporting teachers’ professional growth, and respecting the teaching profession for what it is: the foundation for all other opportunities.

As we support educators to do their best work in classrooms, we will provide the resources and tools to help them meet students’ holistic needs, ranging from their academic growth to their social and emotional development. Using the science of learning and development as a foundation, we will highlight the connections among academic achievement; innovative methods of instruction; and the welcoming, safe, and supportive environments for learning that must exist for students to thrive.

Finally, we will ensure that our commitment to positive outcomes for children, students, families, and learners of all ages and identities is mirrored in our internal practices and our commitment to an effectively run federal agency. We will prioritize information technology, the

use of evidence, and data governance. We will be good stewards of federal funds and acquisition powers. We will recruit and retain a diverse and effective workforce with staff who are committed to the Department’s unique mission and who can see themselves and their own communities in our work every day.

We have an opportunity to strengthen the Department by continuing to listen to families, students, educators, staff, and partners. We have an opportunity to take what we have learned and turn it into action and empower every learner to pursue and achieve their version of the American dream. As dedicated public servants, we will work tirelessly to make progress toward ensuring every student has access to high-quality educational experiences that support their participation in our society, economy, and democracy. President Biden has said, “We are building the America we want to leave for future generations right now, and that work begins with education.”

We are the foundation, and the goals in this Strategic Plan are the building blocks to help ensure education can be the bridge to thriving lives for every American.

As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, supported by unprecedented federal funding, we have a clear vision for what comes next: an American education system that serves all students, gives them a pathway to self-determined success, and values their identity and potential.

We are excited to embark on the tough but necessary work ahead of us, hand-in-hand with America’s students, educators, families, and communities. We will meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century and beyond, and education will illuminate the path.

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.  
*Secretary of Education*



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# About the Department

## Mission

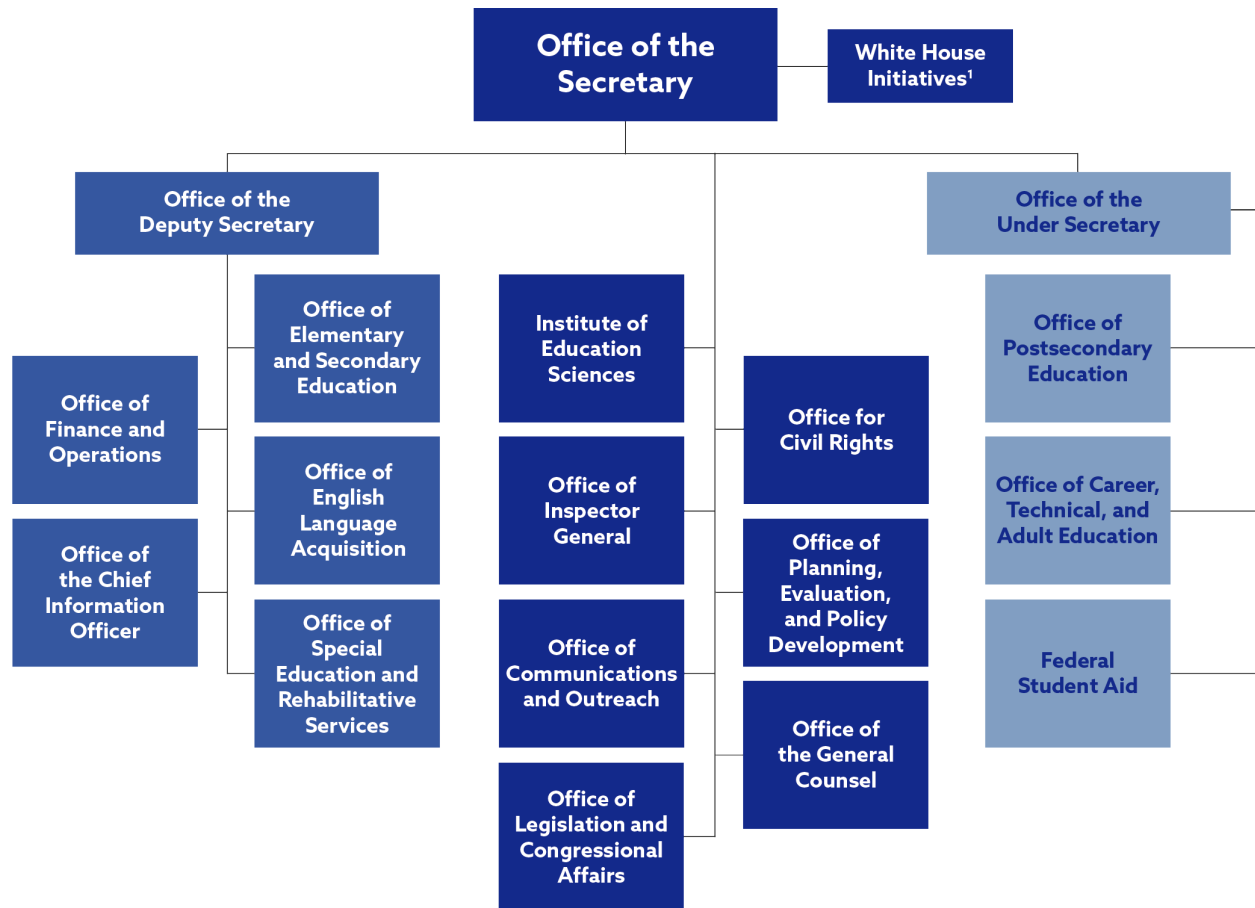
The U.S. Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

The Department accomplishes its education mission by funding programs (i.e., early intervention services and employment training programs) that provide services to children as early as birth all the way to adult learners.

Many of these programs provide grants to state or local educational agencies and support students and families protected by Federal civil rights laws and other laws, including students with disabilities and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Several programs prepare students, teachers, and the nation's citizenry to engage with and succeed in an increasingly globalized world. Other programs provide grants and loans to postsecondary students and facilitate research that examines ways that states, schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions can improve America's education system. In addition, the Department fulfills its mission through the enforcement of student privacy and of Federal civil rights laws that, among other things, provide equal access for all individuals to the programs funded by the Department.

# FY 2022 Organization Structure

The following shows the Department's coordinating structure as of July 2022.



¹The White House Initiatives are: Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities; White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics; White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans; and White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity through Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

## Department Purposes

When Congress created the Department in 1979, it established the following purposes for the agency:

- Strengthen the federal commitment to ensuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual.
- Supplement and complement the efforts of states, local school systems and other instrumentalities of states, the private sector, public and private educational institutions, public and private nonprofit educational research institutions, community-based organizations, parents, and students to improve the quality of education.
- Encourage the increased involvement of the public, parents, and students in federal education programs.
- Promote improvements in the quality and usefulness of education through federally supported research, evaluation, and sharing of information.
- Improve the coordination of federal education programs.
- Improve the management and efficiency of federal education activities, especially with respect to the process, procedures, and administrative structures for the dispersal of federal funds, as well as the reduction of unnecessary and duplicative burdens and constraints, including unnecessary paperwork, on the recipients of federal funds.
- Increase the accountability of federal education programs to the President, Congress, and the public ([Section 102, Pub. L. No. 96-88](#)).

The Department works with state agencies, including education, health, and vocational rehabilitation, as well as local educational agencies, educational institutions, administrators, educators, parents, caregivers, students, and other stakeholders to foster educational excellence and ensure equal access to education for all students.

The components within this Strategic Plan reflect the Administration's and Department's priorities for the direction of the Department and the future of education in the nation. The priorities, such as improving educational equity and meeting the needs of students, are highlighted and woven throughout this Strategic Plan and require cross-organizational collaboration to achieve successful outcomes.

This Strategic Plan also reflects the commitment to and support of the Administration's priorities by placing an emphasis on equity in education opportunities and outcomes for students, especially addressing the needs of those who have been underserved, as well as placing an emphasis on the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery. Disparities across communities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Department will support programs that aim to provide equitable opportunities for all students that can contribute to enhanced outcomes and improve the lives of students.

The Department is committed to the work that lies ahead and will collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to advance this Strategic Plan.



## Stakeholder Engagement

This Strategic Plan and the Department's fiscal year (FY) 2022 and FY 2023 Agency Priority Goals (APGs) were developed based on the priorities of the Administration, and the Department's Secretary, and informed by engagement with internal and external stakeholders, including educators, education policymakers, state and local leaders, education researchers and related organizations, advocacy organizations, students, and families. Specifically, the Department engaged and solicited suggestions, research, and focus areas from staff at all levels across the Department. The feedback from staff provided valuable perspectives about the opportunities and challenges for the Department. Additionally, as required by the [\*Government Performance and Results Act and Modernization Act of 2010\*](#) (GPRAMA), the Department shared the strategic framework and APGs with Congress.

In June 2021, education community stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide comments through a published notice of proposed Secretary's Supplemental Priorities and Definitions for Discretionary Grants Programs in the *Federal Register*. Following the invitation for comments, the [\*Final Priorities and Definitions-Secretary's Supplemental Priorities and Definitions for Discretionary Grants Programs\*](#), which included public comments, discussions, and changes, was published in December 2021. The policy goals in the Strategic Plan align with that document.

## Equity Action Plan

In April 2022, the Department released its inaugural [\*2022 Equity Action Plan related to Executive Order \(EO\) 13985\*](#) as part of the Biden–Harris Administration's continued commitment to advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government. This plan aligns with the one of the President's first EOs: 13985, [\*Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government\*](#). Consistent with the priorities of the Biden–Harris Administration, the Department has and is focused on strengthening the agency's processes, policies, strategies, and culture to ensure equity is the foundation upon which all decisions and protocols rest and strengthening the agency's work and building on its impact.

The Department's Equity Action Plan complements the FY 2022–FY 2026 Strategic Plan, builds on current processes, and implements new strategies to ensure the advancement of equity as it works to promote student achievement and ensure the nation's education system meets the demands of today's global economy. The efforts highlighted in the Equity Action Plan include the following:

- Prioritizing college access and college completion.
- Ensuring equitable impact of American Rescue Plan funding for kindergarten through grade 12 students.
- Investing in resources to help advance civil rights.
- Advancing equity in contracting and procurement.
- Advancing equity in grant process strategies.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

On June 25, 2021, President Biden signed EO 14035, [Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce](#), which aims to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) for the federal workforce. A government-wide Strategic Plan to Advance DEIA in the federal workforce was published in November 2021. It offers a roadmap for implementing EO 14035 in the federal workforce and lays out key steps agencies can take to strengthen DEIA in their workforce policies, practices, and culture. The Department supports EO 14035 through the implementation of a Department DEIA Strategic Plan that guides efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce is reflective of the American people.

## Climate Adaptation Plan

The impact of climate change on students, families, schools, and communities across the country is present, severe, and worsening. The increasing frequency and force of natural disasters, such as flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, extreme heat, extreme cold, wildfires, drought, poor environmental conditions, and other extreme weather events, are impacting student achievement, impeding learning, putting students' personal health and safety as well as social and emotional well-being at risk and causing economic disruption to households and communities. Those who are underserved, including communities with high rates of poverty and other communities that have been marginalized, have a lower capacity to prepare for and cope with extreme weather and climate-related events and are expected to experience greater impacts.

The Department's [Climate Adaptation Plan](#), released in September 2021, provides recommendations for enhancing resilience and addressing climate change by encouraging educators, parents, and student communities to be climate-literate and prepared to act in support of climate change mitigation and adaptation, with a particular emphasis on equity. The plan builds on the lessons learned from the Department's past sustainability action plans, climate change adaptation plans, and environmental justice plans to offer new actions that the Department can undertake to better adapt to climate change and develop agency resilience and resilience across the nation's schools. All students deserve to attend sustainable schools that enhance their health and wellness, prepare them for 21st-century careers, and support a thriving planet. The Department's *Climate Adaptation Plan* looks to implement strategies, such as leveraging its expertise at identifying and supporting sustainable schools under the [Green Ribbon Schools recognition award](#) to put the nation on the path toward sustainable, healthy, resilient, and equitable learning environments.

# Strategic Framework

## Strategic Plan Building Blocks

The following graphic illustrates how the Department's structures facilitate strategic planning, goal setting, reporting, and monitoring to improve operations and achieve the agency's mission.



## FY 2022–FY 2026 Strategic Goals and Objectives

The following highlights the Department’s fiscal year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Strategic Goals and strategic objectives.

<b>Strategic Goal 1: Promote equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and inclusive environments.</b>	
<b>Strategic Objective 1.1</b>	Prioritize the equitable and adequate distribution of resources to communities of concentrated poverty in an effort to provide underserved students with high-quality educational opportunities.
<b>Strategic Objective 1.2</b>	Ensure all students have access to well-rounded, rigorous, engaging, and diverse learning opportunities and environments to support their success in school.
<b>Strategic Objective 1.3</b>	Support states, school districts, and institutions of higher education to promote and protect students’ nondiscriminatory and equal access to education, as provided by Federal civil rights laws.
<b>Strategic Objective 1.4</b>	Promote greater access and supports for youth and adults to engage in learning, succeed in postsecondary education, and increase their employability in high-demand occupations.
<b>Strategic Goal 2: Support a diverse and talented educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning.</b>	
<b>Strategic Objective 2.1</b>	Strengthen and diversify the educator pipeline and workforce.
<b>Strategic Objective 2.2</b>	Identify and promote evidence-based practices or strategies that support diverse districts (including rural districts) with high rates of poverty in recruiting, selecting, preparing, and retaining well-qualified (including in-field fully certified) and effective teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, and specialized instructional support personnel.
<b>Strategic Objective 2.3</b>	Support the professional growth, retention, and advancement of talented, experienced educators and other school personnel and their capacity to meet the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of underserved students.
<b>Strategic Goal 3: Meet students’ social, emotional, and academic needs.</b>	
<b>Strategic Objective 3.1</b>	Support the development and implementation of multitiered systems of supports to increase students’ engagement; social, emotional, and mental health; well-being; and academic success.
<b>Strategic Objective 3.2</b>	Foster supportive, inclusive, and identity-safe learning environments and ensure the individual needs of underserved students are met through appropriately designed instruction, evidence-based practices, and related supports and services.
<b>Strategic Objective 3.3</b>	Strengthen learning environments, support professional development, and improve educator credentialing for emergent bilingual students and multilingual learners.

**Strategic Goal 4: Increase postsecondary value by focusing on equity-conscious strategies to address access to high-quality institutions, affordability, completion, post-enrollment success, and support for inclusive institutions.**

<b>Strategic Objective 4.1</b>	Support educational institutions and state systems in efforts to raise academic quality and college completion for all students, especially for underserved students, such as first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students with disabilities.
<b>Strategic Objective 4.2</b>	Improve the administration of student aid programs to help eligible students receive aid; support borrowers in successfully repaying their loans, claiming loan forgiveness benefits, and mitigating student loan default; and hold contractors accountable.
<b>Strategic Objective 4.3</b>	Increase equitable access to secondary and postsecondary programs that have clear on-ramps to both high-quality jobs and additional high-quality postsecondary educational opportunities.
<b>Strategic Objective 4.4</b>	Improve the alignment across secondary, postsecondary, and career and technical education programs, including through transparent and effective transition processes, inclusive pathways, and clear credentialing requirements.

**Strategic Goal 5: Enhance the Department's internal capacity to optimize the delivery of its mission.**

<b>Strategic Objective 5.1</b>	Manage information technology as a strategic resource and driver to promote the advancement of the missions executed by the Department's 21st-century workforce.
<b>Strategic Objective 5.2</b>	Strengthen agency-wide data governance and build capacity to improve data access, data management, and enterprise data analytics in support of agency goals.
<b>Strategic Objective 5.3</b>	Recruit, retain, and develop the workforce needed to meet the Department's mission now and into the future.
<b>Strategic Objective 5.4</b>	Deliver mission outcomes and value for taxpayers through efficient acquisition management and proactive industry partnerships while promoting small businesses.

## Agency Priority Goals

Agency Priority Goals (APGs) state results to be achieved in a 24-month period. The successful achievement of the Department's APGs depends predominantly on agency execution.

Demonstrating performance relies, in part, on the effective use of high-quality and timely data, including the appropriate design of performance indicators and evaluations and the appropriate use of allocated resources. Quarterly updates for the APGs are available at [Performance.Gov](#).

The Department identified three APGs for FY 2022 and FY 2023 that reflect the top implementation-focused performance improvement priorities of Department leadership and the Administration and are consistent with this Strategic Plan. The APGs, which are aligned to the national priority to advance educational equity, focus on addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively managing federal student loans, and reducing disparities in attainment of high-quality degrees and credentials.

Additional information on APGs can be found in Appendix A.





# 1

## STRATEGIC GOAL

Promote equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and inclusive environments.



# Strategic Goal 1:

**Promote equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and inclusive environments.**

**Goal Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development**

Education is, and always has been, an essential aspect of American life. Adequate resources, opportunities, and supports are needed to designate and create better space for all students to succeed to their full potential.

Although the American education system works for some students, multiple reports, such as those from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) and the [Program for International Student Assessment](#), suggest that inequalities in resources, policies, programs, services, and practices serve as barriers to access to equal educational opportunities for underserved students that need to be redressed. Certain student populations have been underserved by the nation's education systems, including students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students from low-income backgrounds, students experiencing homelessness, and students involved in the juvenile justice system. Due to structural inequalities in access to resources, opportunities, and supports, underserved students can face persistent and profound barriers to educational opportunities. For example, [school year 2017–2018 data](#) from the Office for Civil Rights' (OCR's) Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) showed that schools with high enrollments of students of color were four times more likely to employ uncertified teachers than schools with low enrollments of students of color. Additionally, Black students and students with disabilities were disproportionately subjected to seclusion, restraint, and exclusionary discipline, and Black and Latino students and students with disabilities often had less access to and participated less frequently in rigorous courses to prepare them for college and careers. If student outcomes are to improve, educational resources and opportunities must increase.

The foregoing realities have been further exacerbated by the devastating and adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated previously documented gaps in educational opportunity, including opportunities for social, emotional, and academic development, that magnify the inequities in education described above. Chronic absenteeism increased, and learning gains decreased during virtual and at-home learning, negatively impacting the development of grade-level competencies and proficiency. Additionally, mental health challenges for students and staff have impacted well-being and academic progress.

The *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARP) provides states and districts with critical resources to address these challenges. The \$122 billion ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund provides state educational agencies and local education agencies (LEAs) flexible resources that can support hiring, preparing, and retaining high-quality teachers and school personnel to address teacher shortages and build a stronger pipeline for the future; promote learning acceleration, for example, through summer learning and enrichment and high quality tutoring; and improve indoor air quality through upgrades to heating, ventilation,

and air conditioning systems. ARP also requires LEAs to use 20 percent of their ARP ESSER allocation to address the academic impact of lost instructional time through the implementation of evidence based interventions and that interventions respond to students' social, emotional, and mental health and academic needs and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on students from low-income families, students of color, children with disabilities, English learners, migratory students, students experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, and other disproportionately impacted students.

Improving educational equity for all is a priority for this Administration. The Department seeks to remedy the deeply rooted inequities in this country's education system to increase access to educational opportunity and improve student outcomes. The ARP further facilitates that goal by providing much needed relief to help districts and schools recover and increase capacity to improve student outcomes and address historical inequities.

## **Building Evidence**

Evidence building, described in the Department's Fiscal Year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda (see Appendix B), supports the Department's efforts to promote equity across the nation's education system along two lines. First, the Department seeks to better understand the extent to which the nation's students experience inequities in access to or outcomes of education programs and services the Department supports. As noted in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, a critical tool in that exploration is OCR's [CRDC](#). Collaborative and complementary activities planned by the Office of the Chief Data Officer and Institution of Education Sciences (IES), supported, in part, by a request in the President's FY 2023 Budget, have the potential to bring additional evidence—from per-pupil expenditures to students' access to advanced coursework that prepares them for college and careers—to the fore through public-facing websites.

Assessments administered by IES' National Center for Education Statistics are another important resource for examining equity issues, including assessing courses taken by students, courses offered by schools, classroom activities, extracurriculars, and the availability of technology at home. The Department seeks to understand what policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in remedying inequitable access to resources and opportunities to learn how to best ensure that all students experience education environments that are safe, are free from discrimination, and promote learning and development. The Department seeks to build evidence for various practices and activities along the continuum of available evidence, including research-supported innovations, so that novel approaches can also begin to contribute to this Strategic Goal.

## Strategic Objective 1.1

**Prioritize the equitable and adequate distribution of resources to communities of concentrated poverty in an effort to provide underserved students with high-quality educational opportunities.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education**

Due to structural inequalities in access to resources throughout the nation's education systems, underserved students (as defined in Appendix E), including students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, Native American students, multilingual learners, children living in rural areas, and students with disabilities, face persistent and profound barriers to educational opportunities. The Department is focused on implementing strategies that seek to address inequities and improve academic and other education-related outcomes. This is especially urgent given the many adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department is committed to extending and leveraging the resources of the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARP), specifically through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF), and other applicable funding sources provided through ARP.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education; the Office of Postsecondary Education; the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and the Institute of Education Sciences (especially through its National Center for Education Sciences).

These offices oversee several funding areas in support of this strategic objective, including Education for the Disadvantaged, Indian Education, School Improvement Programs, Safe Schools and Citizenship Education, Innovation and Improvement, and multiple grants to strengthen Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, and Minority-Serving Institutions. Funding areas include several programs, evidence-based studies, and data analyses designed to help state and local educational agencies and colleges improve student achievement and support equal access to services for students. In addition to these funding sources, ARP ESSER funds also offer considerable support.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Leverage ARP ESSER funds to address and decrease inequities caused or exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to support schools, students, families, and communities' academic recovery and well-being. Use tools, such as the enforcement of maintenance of effort and maintenance of equity rules, and leverage evidence-based interventions to provide systemic supports to ensure equitable access to educational opportunity, particularly for underserved subgroups adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.



- Support programs promoting postsecondary degree attainment, including for students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation college students, and students of color enrolled in secondary and postsecondary education.
- Administer discretionary grants to support programs and activities that improve academic and developmental outcomes of children living in distressed communities and grants to support services designed to increase opportunities and outcomes for children and students with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- Decrease the digital access and digital use divides by supporting programs that increase student access to technology and broadband and by increasing student engagement and digital fluency through instruction that leverages technology as a creative and playful medium that enhances student learning, including by supporting educator (as defined in Appendix E) development.
- Provide best practices on use of Title I, Part A Improving Academic Achievement formula grant funds that provide extra academic support to help students in schools with high rates of poverty meet challenging state academic standards.
- Provide students from low-income backgrounds with greater access to qualified, experienced, and effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.
- Support the creation, development, implementation, evaluation, replication, and scaling up of evidence-based innovations designed to improve student achievement and attainment for underserved, high-needs students.

## Desired Outcomes

- There is increased capacity of states, school districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to address the needs of students.
- There is a more equitable allocation of federal, state, and local funding, including ARP ESSER and HEERF funds.
- There is increased access to educational resources and opportunities for underserved students as a result of decreased disparities in funding between under-resourced school districts and IHEs that enrolled a large number of underserved students.
- There is improved student engagement and digital fluency through advancements in student access to technology and broadband services.

## Strategic Objective 1.2

**Ensure all students have access to well-rounded, rigorous, engaging, and diverse learning opportunities and environments to support their success in school.**

**Strategic Objective Leaders: Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development and Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education**

Access to educational opportunities is an integral part of providing students with diverse learning environments. Students who feel connected to school are [more likely to succeed](#) through increased school attendance, grades, achievement, and educational attainment. Building these relationships requires perspectives that embrace positive attitudes, cultural and linguistic competence, and an understanding of the needs and experiences of students and of the school environment. The Department is focused on implementing strategies that seek to increase access to learning opportunities and inclusive environments for students.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development; the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE); and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

OESE oversees funding areas in support of this strategic objective, including School Improvement Programs, the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, Indian Education, Effective Educator Development, Teacher Quality, and Innovation and Improvement programs. OSERS also supports this strategic objective through administering the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, which provides grants to states to assist them in providing special education and related services to children with disabilities. Each funding area includes several programs designed to help state and local educational agencies improve access to diverse and rigorous learning environments and opportunities.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Support programs that ensure schools are safe, inclusive, and healthy places of teaching and learning for students, teachers, and other education professionals.
- Leverage ARP ESSER and other federal funds to address teacher shortages exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic through investing in effective, evidence-based, innovative, and promising strategies to recruit and retain teachers.
- Support opportunities to build the knowledge and skills of teachers in designing teaching and learning in ways that provide well-rounded, rigorous, and engaging learning experiences to students.
- Support students' preparation for, access to, and success in rigorous prekindergarten through grade 12 (i.e., P–12) course work that prepare them for postsecondary education and in-demand occupations using evidence-based approaches.



- Expand participation in multistate collaboratives and other technical assistance initiatives to address opportunity gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Provide impactful technical assistance through regional meetings, webinars, and national conferences to further promote equity in P–12 and postsecondary education.

### **Desired Outcomes**

- Students receive high-quality and personalized learning opportunities as a result of more effective preparation and professional development opportunities for teachers, which can be supported by ARP ESSER funds.
- Students are provided with adequate and diverse learning opportunities and environments to meet their educational needs through safe and inclusive learning environments; well-prepared, supported, and diverse educators; rigorous and engaging learning and course work; and technical assistance.

## Strategic Objective 1.3

**Support states, school districts, and institutions of higher education to promote and protect students' nondiscriminatory and equal access to education, as provided by Federal civil rights laws.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office for Civil Rights**

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the civil rights law enforcement agency within the Department, focuses on ensuring that laws safeguarding the civil rights of students are enforced to their fullest extent. OCR enforces several Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by [Title VI](#) of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*; sex discrimination in education programs and activities is prohibited by [Title IX](#) of the *Education Amendments of 1972*; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by [Section 504](#) of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*; and age discrimination is prohibited by the [Age Discrimination Act of 1975](#). OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#), which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities whether or not they receive federal financial assistance. In addition, since January 8, 2002, OCR has enforced the [Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act](#) (Section 9525 of the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965](#), as amended by the [No Child Left Behind Act of 2001](#)).

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include OCR, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE).

OSERS will support the implementation strategies of this strategic objective by administering to states grants designed to improve results and outcomes for students with disabilities and ensure that parents of children with disabilities and youth have access to resources, information, and training. OPE supports this objective through programs and activities providing services and supports that improve access to and success in postsecondary education for students with disabilities.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Regulate and/or provide policy guidance that focuses on how schools and districts serving students in prekindergarten through grade 12 and institutions of higher education may comply with Federal civil rights laws by ensuring equal access to educational opportunities and by avoiding and addressing discrimination based on race, color, national origin, disability, sex, and age.
- Efficiently and thoroughly enforce the Federal civil rights laws within OCR's jurisdiction.

- Collect, expand, analyze, and publish information and civil rights data about the experiences of students, including their access to resources and educational opportunities, as well as school climate factors, such as the use of student discipline and incidents of student harassment, through OCR's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). The Department has collected civil rights data about the nation's public schools via CRDC since 1968.
- Oversee the civil rights compliance programs of state agencies that administer career and technical education (CTE), including through the Methods of Administration authority to ensure that all students, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability, have equal access to CTE programs.
- Collect, analyze, and publish information and data about infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities and their families, including access to early intervention services in natural environments and a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

## Desired Outcomes

- Federal civil rights laws are effectively and aggressively enforced, and students have equal access to educational opportunities within safe and healthy learning environments.
- Civil rights data and information about the experiences of students, including their access to resources and educational opportunities, as well as school climate factors, such as the use of student discipline and incidents of student harassment, through the CRDC are widely known and resolved.

## Strategic Objective 1.4

**Promote greater access and supports for youth and adults to engage in learning, succeed in postsecondary education, and increase their employability in high-demand occupations.**

**Strategic Objective Leaders: Assistant Secretary, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and Assistant Secretary, Office of Postsecondary Education**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many students have been hindered from academic instruction due to a [lack of access to online platforms](#), and some adult learners face additional challenges of economic, personal, and academic uncertainty. An analysis conducted in [June 2020](#) found that 15 to 16 million public school students across the United States live in households without adequate internet access or computing devices to facilitate distance learning. The Department supports programs intended to reach and support youth and adult learners in preparation for and completion of postsecondary education, including degree and certification attainment, to help them gain employment in high-growth industries and in-demand occupations.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE); the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE); the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

Specifically, OCTAE's funding area of career, technical, and adult education will support the implementation strategies of this strategic objective. This funding area includes career and technical education programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels that support attainment of both academic and career skills and help students learn about career pathways and attain credentials needed for high-quality jobs and in-demand careers as well as adult education programs that enable youth and adults without a high school diploma to acquire basic skills and challenging academic and technical skills to be prepared for high-demand occupations in the 21st century. OPE's programs help students, beginning as early as middle school, access and succeed in postsecondary education. OSERS programs help individuals with disabilities become gainfully employed through the provision of services, such as vocational evaluation, counseling and guidance, work adjustment, diagnosis and treatment of physical and mental impairments, education and vocational training, job placement, and postemployment assistance.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Support efforts that focus on youth work-based learning and industry credential attainment as well as related evaluation and technical assistance activities.
- Improve access to and funding for educational programs, including those available in correctional settings, and better prepare youth and adults who are incarcerated for successful reentry into society, including by increasing their opportunity to earn secondary and postsecondary credentials.

- Use grant funding and technical assistance to support a wide range of activities that help prepare youth and adults in acquiring the academic, employability, and technical skills as well as the cultural and linguistic competencies for in-demand occupations.
- Increase access to integrated education and training programs that prepare graduates for high-quality jobs in high-demand career fields.
- Expand the delivery of high-quality educational opportunities for adult educators that enable adult learners to successfully transition to postsecondary education and training and in-demand occupations and launch 21st-century careers.
- Narrow gaps and disparities in outcomes among adult education participants, including those identified by the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* as having barriers to employment.
- Strengthen collaboration among governmental and nongovernmental partners to encourage more institutions of higher education to access federal resources for adult learners.
- Increase the rate at which Vocational Rehabilitation Program participants achieve Measurable Skill Gains and earn recognized secondary or postsecondary credentials as they pursue competitive integrated employment.

## Desired Outcomes

- Adult learners are reengaged and succeeding in education, increasing their employability in high-quality, in-demand occupations and high-growth industries.
- Youth learners have increased academic achievements leading to enhanced preparation for employability or further education through work-based learning, industry credential attainment, and dual enrollment opportunities.
- Youth and adults who are or have recently been incarcerated have additional pathways through access to educational opportunities for successful reentry into society, including increased opportunities to earn secondary and postsecondary credentials.



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# STRATEGIC GOAL

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Support a diverse and talented educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning.

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# 2





# Strategic Goal 2:

**Support a diverse and talented educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning.**

**Goal Leaders: Senior Advisor, Office of the Deputy Secretary and Assistant Secretary, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development**

Teachers are essential to the learning and development of the students they serve. However, the educator workforce faces several challenges that limit students' educational opportunities and place at risk the success of students, particularly those who have been underserved by education systems.

One challenge that the education system faces is that many states and regions are experiencing significant [teacher shortages](#) in kindergarten through grade 12 (i.e., K–12) schools, particularly in mathematics, science, career and technical education, special education, and bilingual education. A second challenge is [inequity in the distribution](#) of well-qualified, experienced, and effective teachers. Both schools in communities experiencing poverty and those that enroll higher proportions of students of color are more likely to employ teachers who have fewer years of experience, who are not fully certified, or who are not certified in the subject area in which they are currently teaching. A third challenge is that the teacher workforce does not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the [nation's student body](#). Educator diversity benefits all students, and in particular, benefits students of color.

It is essential to attract, prepare, support, develop, and retain a diverse, well-qualified, experienced, and effective pool of educators by ensuring candidates have access to high-quality comprehensive preparation programs, such as residency programs, and that steps are taken to support and retain qualified, experienced, and effective educators through practices such as mentoring early career teachers, improving working conditions, and creating or enhancing opportunities for professional growth and leadership. The Department is committed to and focused on making substantial progress in decreasing teacher shortages nationwide that have increased in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In December 2021, Secretary Miguel Cardona sent a [Dear Colleagues Letter](#) to the field on how *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding can support evidence-based and promising short- and long-term strategies to address teacher and staff shortages. Specifically, the guidance described how states and school districts can use ARP ESSER funds to (1) increase educator and staff compensation; (2) build and maintain a cadre of high-quality substitute teachers; (3) support educator and staff well-being, including improved working conditions; and (4) make continual investments in the educator pipeline. It is also important that the diversity of the educator workforce reflects the diversity of the nation. Therefore, the Department also seeks to encourage the use of ARP ESSER funds to prepare and retain a diverse educator workforce.

## Building Evidence

As part of its Fiscal Year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department plans to build evidence in service of Strategic Goal 2 to support a sufficiently resourced, diverse, and qualified educator workforce in three ways. First, it seeks to ensure that school districts and schools have the increased amounts of adequate educators they need and that they are well prepared and ready to support the full range of students’ social, emotional, and academic needs. For example, work is already underway at the Department’s Institute of Education Sciences to build on existing research and better understand the role of teacher residency programs in preparing new teachers. The Department will use and build evidence in this area through competitive grant programs. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services invests in personnel preparation areas that focus on preparing teachers, early interventionists, and related service providers to implement evidence-based practices. Second, the Department seeks to ensure that in-service educators continue to receive high-quality professional development to bolster their instruction and opportunities for career growth to ensure well-qualified educators remain in the classroom. Work on improving instruction via feedback as well as the use of teacher-leader models have already begun. Finally, the Department seeks to better understand the extent to which the educator workforce, particularly teachers who are well-qualified in their specific field of instruction, reflects today’s student demographics and that all students have access to a diverse educator workforce throughout their K–12 experience.

## Strategic Objective 2.1

### Strengthen and diversify the educator pipeline and workforce.

**Strategic Objective Leaders: Assistant Secretary, Office of Postsecondary Education and Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education**

The Department recognizes that implementing policies that help build the educator pipeline and workforce is more critical now than ever given critical teacher shortages. The Department has created a target series of guidance, fact-sheets, webinars, and other resources to promote improvements in hiring additional teachers and substitute teachers, including diversifying the teacher pipeline, and instructional practices to improve the social welfare and academic success of all students, particularly students of color. Diversity among teachers, administrators, and other educators that reflects the diversity of the nation contributes to improving equity in education systems. [Research](#) indicates that students of color tend to graduate at a higher rate if they have access to a diverse faculty. Research also shows that having diverse educators can increase academic performance, lower rates of chronic absenteeism, and increase graduation rates of students of color. Having a diverse staff of educators in a school brings differing perspectives and approaches to working with students, which can increase the likelihood of success among the students they serve.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Postsecondary Education, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and Federal Student Aid (FSA).

OESE oversees funding areas in support of this strategic objective that include programs designed to support state and local efforts to implement evidence-based teacher development programs; enhance professional development for new teachers; and support alternative routes to obtaining teaching certification through grants to states, local educational agencies, institutions of higher education (IHEs), or other organizations. OSERS oversees Rehabilitation Services and Disability Research funding areas, including programs designed to help state educational agencies improve their systems for personnel preparation and professional development of individuals providing services to improve results for children with disabilities. FSA's funding area includes Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) grants, Teacher Loan Forgiveness programs designed to prepare highly qualified teachers to teach in high-need fields, and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), which is designed to encourage student borrowers to enter public service and nonprofit employment after graduation.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Fund national technical assistance centers that support state systems and IHEs in recruiting, preparing, and graduating diverse educators and providers.

- Fund personnel preparation grants to prepare diverse early intervention service providers, special educators, vocational rehabilitation services providers, and specialized instructional support personnel to provide culturally responsive supports to students.
- Support and fund high-quality, comprehensive educator preparation programs that help to stem teacher shortages and build the educator pipeline, by emphasizing outreach, recruitment, retention, graduation, and placement of additional educators, including those from traditionally underrepresented teacher candidates.
- Support programs that develop, implement, and enhance a leadership pipeline to select, prepare, place, mentor, coach, and retain diverse school leaders, including for under-represented educators.
- Expand access to teacher residency, teacher apprenticeship, and Grow Your Own programs as well as expand the recruitment and preparation of diverse teacher candidates.
- Support states by sharing best practices on use of Title II, Part A Supporting Effective Instruction formula grant funds to prepare, train, and recruit high-quality teachers, principals, and/or other school leaders.
- Collect and disseminate resources and information on recruiting under-represented educators and implementing preparation programs within technical assistance venues, such as communities of practice.

## Desired Outcomes

- There is an increased number of high-quality educators and substitute teachers, decreased nationwide shortages, and increased retention rates.
- There are more teacher candidates in programs that recruit, comprehensively prepare, and graduate educators, including more teacher candidates from traditionally underrepresented teacher candidates.
- There is an increased number of high-quality educators from traditionally underrepresented teacher candidates placed in schools and districts, particularly those with large percentages of students of color.
- There is an increased number of mentoring and leadership development programs to retain educators, particularly educators from under-represented backgrounds.

## Strategic Objective 2.2

**Identify and promote evidence-based practices or strategies that support diverse districts (including rural districts) with high rates of poverty in recruiting, selecting, preparing, and retaining well-qualified (including in-field fully certified) and effective teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, and specialized instructional support personnel.**

**Strategic Objective Leaders: Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development and Director, Institute of Education Sciences**

Fully certified, experienced, and effective educators and early intervention service providers make significant contributions to student academic outcomes. However, there is [significant inequity in student access](#) to such educators, particularly for underserved students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students with disabilities. Furthermore, a diverse educator workforce yields benefits for students as well. Studies have found higher levels of student achievement, enrollment in more rigorous courses, increased referrals to gifted and talented programs, and reductions in exclusionary discipline when students of color and educators of color share the classroom and when students have access to well-qualified, experienced, and effective educators.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development; the Institute of Education Sciences (IES); the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE); the Office of Postsecondary Education; and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

OESE oversees two funding areas in support of this strategic objective: School Improvement Programs as well as Innovation and Improvement. IES and OSERS also oversee funding areas to support this strategic objective.

Offices across the Department are also working to elevate strategies to address teacher shortages, including those that can be funded through the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARP) and other federal resources. This includes the releasing of calls to action, Dear Colleague Letters, facts sheets, and webinars highlighting these strategies, where the work is currently happening, and opportunities to scale these efforts. The Department is also working in partnership with other agencies, such as the Departments of Labor, Treasury, and Transportation, to support these efforts.

Programs within OESE's funding area of Innovation and Improvement will support the implementation strategies for this strategic objective by supporting the implementation of evidence-based preparation, development, and enhancement opportunities for educators. OSERS oversees funding areas that include programs designed to help state educational agencies and early intervention lead agencies improve systems for personnel preparation and professional development of individuals providing instruction and services to students with disabilities. Additionally, funding areas within IES will support implementation strategies for this strategic objective by conducting research aimed at identifying evidence-based practices related to effective teacher preparation, professional development, and retention.

## Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Support grants that improve local educational agencies' processes for recruiting, selecting, preparing, placing, supporting, and retaining effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders in high-needs schools, including how ARP and other federal relief funds can be used to support these efforts.
- Ensure states and districts have data and other relevant information needed to make evidence-based and data-informed decisions, including on recruiting and retaining teachers and other educators.
- Support programs and strategies to increase the number and percentage of fully certified teachers and teachers with additional certifications or training to teach high-demand subject areas in high-needs schools experiencing significant teacher shortages.
- Support programs that help rural school districts carry out activities to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.
- Support programs that help states reform and enhance their systems in the areas of early intervention, educational, and transition services to improve outcomes for children with disabilities.
- Support high-retention, specialized programs and effective pathways into teaching that provide strong support and incentives for educators working in geographically diverse areas.

## Desired Outcomes

- There is an increased number of well-qualified, experienced, and effective educators representing the diversity of the nation working in schools and districts with high rates of poverty and in rural schools and districts.
- There is a reduced shortage of well-qualified, experienced, and effective teachers, educators, and administrators recruited to and retained within high-needs schools and schools in geographically underserved areas.
- There is an adequate number of teachers with advanced certifications teaching in high-demand subject areas.



## Strategic Objective 2.3

**Support the professional growth, retention, and advancement of talented, experienced educators and other school personnel and their capacity to meet the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of underserved students.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education**

To strengthen student learning in a supportive environment, it is essential to recruit and retain qualified teachers and other instructional support personnel. The Department is dedicated to stabilizing a diverse and qualified educator workforce in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted not only the nation's children but also the personnel who support them in their academic pursuits. The Department recognizes the need to support additional essential skilled staff to safely reopen schools and programs, keep them open, and provide in-person services to address students' needs.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE); the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education; the Office of Postsecondary Education; the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS); and Federal Student Aid.

OESE oversees funding areas that support the implementation strategies of this strategic objective. These funding areas include programs designed to improve teacher and principal quality, provide high-quality preparation programs, and provide enhanced professional development activities for new teachers. Additionally, OSERS oversees funding areas that include programs designed to support states that meet the state-identified need to obtain fully certified personnel and improve practices of professionals and others involved in providing services that promote academic achievement for students with disabilities.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Support the allocation of additional resources to prekindergarten through grade 12 schools and postsecondary institutions to build the capacity of educators and other school personnel to support the mental health of students.
- Support activities designed to increase student achievement by improving and increasing the effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other educators.
- Leverage existing grants to support teacher candidates and public-school teachers to obtain initial and additional certifications in high-demand subject areas such as special education; bilingual education; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education; and career and technical education (CTE).
- Support states in hiring teachers and other school personnel, including school counselors and school nurses, with federal funds including pandemic recovery funds.

## Desired Outcomes

- Underserved students are provided educational opportunities and social and emotional supports through experienced and effective educators, nonteaching school staff, and health professionals.
- There are an increased number of public-school teachers that have obtained certifications in high-demand subject areas, such as special education, bilingual education, STEM education, and CTE, to meet the needs of all students, particularly underserved students.



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# STRATEGIC GOAL

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Meet students' social, emotional, and academic needs.

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# 3



# Strategic Goal 3:

**Meet students' social, emotional, and academic needs.**

**Goal Leader: Senior Advisor, Office of the Deputy Secretary**

Learning and development across a student's life span are influenced by several deeply interrelated factors, including the individual's social, emotional, academic, and career development. Generally, [research](#) has shown that growth in one domain is positively associated with strengthening outcomes associated with the other domains. Attending to each is a promising strategy for improving a wide range of outcomes for all students. In addition, access to evidence-based programs and school–family–community partnerships bolsters [social and emotional development](#), academic achievement, and career development.

Research has shown that a safe, healthy, and equitable school climate that addresses students' social and emotional development is associated with higher student attendance and engagement, improved student connectedness, and better social and emotional health. These conditions also correlate with greater job satisfaction and higher retention for school staff. Examples of social and emotional development in school settings include activities that cultivate attention, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, innovation, empathy, and ability to resolve conflicts.

## Building Evidence

The Department's Fiscal Year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda emphasizes better understanding of the policies, programs, services, and practices that promote growth across a range of important learning and developmental outcomes, including social and emotional learning, academic achievement, and career attainment. There is a particular emphasis on identifying strategies that are effective for students belonging to groups that have been underserved by education systems. Evidence building relevant to this Strategic Goal occurs across the Department, including grant activities at the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES') National Center for Education Research and National Center for Special Education Research, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's Education Innovation and Research discretionary grant program, and the Research to Training activities of the Office of Special Education Programs. Of note is ongoing work led by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance and the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education as part of the National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education Programs under [Perkins V](#). This national evaluation draws on impact studies being conducted through IES' grantmaking and fills evidence gaps as needed with new studies.

## Strategic Objective 3.1

**Support the development and implementation of multitiered systems of supports to increase students' engagement; social, emotional, and mental health; well-being; and academic success.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education**

The U.S. education systems at the state and local levels continue to address the disruption in student learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Underserved students have experienced a disproportionate impact from the pandemic, both academically and socially. These academic and social tolls necessitate additional supports and interventions to redress students' social, emotional, mental health, and well-being success; support student learning; and close gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes. The Department supports programs that address the holistic well-being of students.

Social and emotional competencies have been associated with academic and behavioral successes as well as improving outcomes for at-risk populations. Addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral well-being of students and the educators and professionals who educate and support them is critical as schools, educators, families, and students confront the challenges of continuing to navigate and recover from this national health crisis.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), the Office of Postsecondary Education, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and the Institute of Education Sciences.

OESE oversees funding for several areas in support of this strategic objective, including School Improvement Programs, Safe and Supportive Schools, Arts Education, teaching American history, government and civic engagement, and *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARP) Elementary Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. With ARP ESSER, school districts receive funds to help with the implementation of evidence-based interventions to address students' social and emotional development and needs, mental health, and overall well-being, specifically focused on the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on underrepresented student subgroups. Both OESE and OSERS provide funding and technical assistance aimed at building state and local capacity to implement multitiered systems of supports.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Leverage ARP ESSER funding to address and improve social, emotional, and mental health outcomes, such as by increasing the number of school-based health service providers serving in schools, especially in high-poverty schools most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.



- Support states in the use of funding to provide wrap-around services for underserved students, including students experiencing homelessness and through the expansion of full-service community schools.
- Expand resources for Full-Service Community Schools, which play a critical role in providing comprehensive wrap-around services to students and their families, including afterschool services, adult education opportunities, and health and nutrition services.
- Support geographically isolated communities by providing and expanding access to resources through cross-state or district collaboration (e.g., communities of practice).
- Implement model programs that enable access to mental health services for underserved students that are culturally and linguistically responsive for elementary and secondary students and offer equitable access to mental health professionals and other integrated services and supports.
- Fund early intervention services and special education services that provide social and emotional developmental resources for infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities to prepare them for academic success.
- Provide funding to programs, such as literacy programs, community support, and mental health support, designed to advance equity and excellence for Native American students.

## **Desired Outcomes**

- A wide range of community-based resources are available to support students and their families.
- States and school districts adopt effective, multitiered systems of supports, with a focus on underserved students.
- Students and families in communities with high rates of poverty receive comprehensive social, emotional, and mental health services to support improved academic outcomes.



## Strategic Objective 3.2

**Foster supportive, inclusive, and identity-safe learning environments and ensure the individual needs of underserved students are met through appropriately designed instruction, evidence-based practices, and related supports and services.**

**Strategic Objective Leaders: Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services**

The [National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments](#) reports that a positive school climate is critically related to school success, impacting students beyond academic achievement in the classroom. It further states that students' academic achievement improves when they are in environments in which they feel safe, supported, and accepted. These types of environments also help students feel better about themselves, their peers, and their community. In healthy learning environments, students are more motivated to perform better and enhance their social skills by building friendships and working with others. The Department supports the education community in creating and maintaining healthy school environments that can contribute to lifelong benefits.

Educators and administrators require a knowledge base and tools that support up-to-date, evidence-based instructional activities to improve outcomes for all students and particularly for disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), the Office of Postsecondary Education, and the Institute of Education Sciences.

OESE oversees funding for several areas in support of this strategic objective, including Innovation and Improvement, School Improvement Programs, Safe and Supportive Schools, and Arts Education. American Rescue Plan Elementary Secondary School Emergency Relief funds set aside to address learning loss are also required to respond to students' social, emotional, and mental health needs and address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students disproportionately impacted. OSERS supports this strategic objective by providing grants, such as projects that the Department uses to continually improve current practices and technical assistance to states, local educational agencies, and families to support students with disabilities.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Support the investment of federal pandemic recovery funds in evidence-based interventions, including tailored acceleration, personalized learning, high-quality tutoring, afterschool and summer learning, and enrichment to address the social, emotional, mental health, and academic impact of lost instructional time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Provide guidance and technical assistance to early intervention service providers, schools, school districts, and states on how to create positive, inclusive, and identity-safe school climates that keep students in school and engaged in learning by adopting proven school- and community-based programs, such as social and emotional learning, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and trauma-informed and restorative practices.
- Fund programs and services that focus on identifying and disseminating promising practices and evidence-based strategies for improving student opportunities and outcomes, with a particular focus on underserved students.
- Offer enhanced tools and resources to develop educators' capacities to implement equitable school policies and identity safety plans and that create inclusive and identity-safe learning environments.

## **Desired Outcomes**

- Underserved students receive equitable access to supportive, inclusive, and identity-safe environments.
- School districts, schools, early intervention systems, educators, and other providers support students of different cultural and language backgrounds as well as students with disabilities, among others, and help them overcome adversity and build their social, emotional, motivational, and academic resilience.
- Improved academic outcomes for all students, particularly students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Strategic Objective 3.3

**Strengthen learning environments, support professional development, and improve educator credentialing for emergent bilingual students and multilingual learners.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of English Language Acquisition**

With the increasing diversity of the U.S. population, [ethnically and racially diverse students represent 53 percent of the U.S. student population](#), and multilingual learners are a growing part of the kindergarten through grade 12 student population. Between the [2009–2010 and 2014–2015 school years](#), the percentage of English learner or multilingual students increased in more than half of the 50 states, comprising a tremendously diverse group representing numerous languages, cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities. There are many benefits that students who are bilingual and multilingual bring to education and learning, including facilitating cross-cultural communication, creating cultural awareness, and adding academic and educational value. Designing and providing culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments allows students to apply their learning in authentic and real-world settings; communicate and collaborate effectively; and develop academic mindsets, including through project-based, work-based, or other experiential learning opportunities.

Several offices across the Department support this strategic objective, including the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

OELA oversees funding areas to support multilingual learners and immigrant students in attaining English proficiency and supports all students in obtaining multiliteracy skills. OESE and IES also support this strategic objective by providing grants, technical assistance, and research for education stakeholders to support academic success for multilingual learners.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Administer Title III, Part A of the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) *English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act* and National Professional Development grants to support eligible entities in preparing and training educators toward becoming state certified, licensed, or endorsed in English language instruction.
- Support programs and services that enhance the practice, maintenance, and revitalization of native languages for American Indian/Alaskan Native students.
- Support programs and services that enhance English language acquisition for multilingual learners, including awarding grants to eligible entities to develop and enhance capacity to provide effective instruction and support to Native American students who identify as multilingual learners.

- Increase supports and funding to states and school districts to provide effective language assistance to parents such as translated materials and competent language interpreters for students and families with limited English proficiency.
- Provide guidance and information on how school districts and schools can foster inclusive environments by ensuring that schools meet the needs of multilingual learners through the provision of appropriate language services and supports.
- Support programs that provide integrated approaches to English language acquisition and occupationally focused services to immigrants and refugees, including individuals who have professional credentials in their native countries.

## **Desired Outcomes**

- There is increased support, communication, services, programs, and resources that enhance learning environments and outcomes for multilingual learners.



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# STRATEGIC GOAL

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Increase postsecondary value by focusing on equity-conscious strategies to address access to high-quality institutions, affordability, completion, post-enrollment success, and support for inclusive institutions.

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# 4





# Strategic Goal 4:

**Increase postsecondary value by focusing on equity-conscious strategies to address access to high-quality institutions, affordability, completion, post-enrollment success, and support for inclusive institutions.**

**Goal Leader: Under Secretary, Office of the Under Secretary**

Between 2000 and 2019, educational attainment rates among 25- to 29-year-olds [increased at every education level](#). The attainment rate for an associate degree or higher increased from 38 to 49 percent; the attainment rate for a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 29 to 39 percent; and the attainment rate for a master's degree or higher increased from 5 to 9 percent. Because completing education and training beyond high school is increasingly important for success across a wide range of life outcomes, significant concerns about access and success in postsecondary education remain. Once enrolled, graduation is far from guaranteed; in fact, for the majority of students, it does not lead to a credential. Black and Hispanic students graduate at a far lower rate than White students at [two-year postsecondary institutions](#) and [four-year postsecondary institutions](#).

Affordability remains a major reason for these challenges. The average net price of a college education has risen for many undergraduates, particularly full-time students in traditional associate and bachelor's degree programs from low-income backgrounds. Analysis from the [National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#) shows that, from 2012 to 2016, the net price of postsecondary education increased by 12 percent for students attending public two-year institutions and by more than 20 percent for students attending four-year public colleges and universities, widening the affordability gap. Black students also [borrow](#) federal student loans at a much higher rate than White students, contributing to the costs of staying enrolled.

## Building Evidence

The Department's Fiscal Year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda includes a series of priority learning questions focused on postsecondary, adult, and continuing education designed to ensure students' equitable access to and success within education and training after high school. In service of the Department's Strategic Goals and strategic objectives, evidence building is expected to proceed along two primary lines. First, the Department is exploring policies, programs, practices, and services associated with getting students to (and through) postsecondary education. Emphases include making postsecondary education more affordable and better meeting the needs of students who have been traditionally underserved by postsecondary education. Notably, some work in this area has already begun, such as ongoing work by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to [improve college enrollment rates among disadvantaged adults](#). IES is also planning a randomized, controlled trial of professional development for career navigators in adult education. Second, the Department seeks to better understand how to support postsecondary institutions, particularly Minority-Serving Institutions, Tribal colleges or universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, community colleges, rural institutions, and other institutions that are under-resourced as they strive to meet their academic missions.



## Strategic Objective 4.1

**Support educational institutions and state systems in efforts to raise academic quality and college completion for all students, especially for underserved students, such as first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students with disabilities.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office of Postsecondary Education**

Postsecondary education—a necessity to compete in a global economy—is one of the most important investments that individuals can make in themselves. The nation must increase quality and completion rates of all levels of postsecondary education, including providers and institutions offering certificates, two-year credentials, and four-year credentials. This strategic objective will help the Department support efforts to diversify, prepare, and enroll underserved students in postsecondary education and help them succeed.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE); the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education; and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

Programs within OPE’s funding area of Higher Education will support the implementation strategies of this strategic objective. They are designed to support underserved students, including low-income, first-generation students, and individuals with disabilities, as they progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to graduate school. The programs also focus on college readiness, campus-based childcare, and graduate fellowships. OSERS’ Rehabilitation Services Administration supports pre-employment transition services for youth with disabilities as well as education and training services for individuals who have completed high school.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Provide Title III, Part A English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act grants to institutions of higher education (IHEs) to expand their capacity to serve low-income students by strengthening their academic quality and institutional management.
- Coordinate with government offices, agencies, and philanthropic organizations to leverage public and private informational resources and supports, that will increase postsecondary students’ access to quality educational offerings.
- Support state educational agencies, local educational agencies, and IHEs in preparing students for postsecondary success through rigorous and relevant coursework, access to advanced study materials, academic options (i.e., dual enrollment), and college and career counseling with a focus on underserved students.

- Create partnerships with states and IHEs to address systemic problems, such as replicating strategies that have worked at other IHEs to increase degree attainment for transfer students.
- Provide technical assistance to state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies through monitoring and Rehabilitation Services Administration-funded resources.
- Improve the quality of research available to and conducted by IHE grantees through increased support of data collection, research strategies, and dissemination of knowledge on access, affordability, completion, and post-enrollment success.
- Enhance the College Financing Plan to provide increased transparency and simplified language to students so they better understand and can compare financial aid offers.
- Increase the number and diversity of institutional applicants from community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, Minority-Serving Institutions, and public four-year colleges in higher education grants.

## Desired Outcomes

- There is increased enrollment and program completion by students, especially those who are underserved, across high-quality, affordable postsecondary institutions.
- There is an increased number of VR program participants who are enrolled in and completing postsecondary education and training programs.
- There is improved quality, connectivity, and accessibility of postsecondary data systems to facilitate the use of analytics and the measuring of equity gaps in support of postsecondary outcomes.

## Strategic Objective 4.2

**Improve the administration of student aid programs to help eligible students receive aid; support borrowers in successfully repaying their loans, claiming loan forgiveness benefits, and mitigating student loan default; and hold contractors accountable.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Chief Operating Officer, Federal Student Aid**

Through Federal Student Aid (FSA), the Department administers student loans for approximately 45 million borrowers, which equates to 1 in 6 adult Americans, and awards more than \$120 billion per year in grants, work-study funds, and low-interest loans to approximately 10.1 million students.

By increasing both access to diverse postsecondary pathways as well as awareness and accessibility of student aid programs, the Department can help students enroll in and graduate from institutions of higher education with the skills and expertise necessary for in-demand occupations, high-growth industries, and 21st-century careers. Additionally, enhancing communication, supports, and student aid processes can help equalize academic opportunity in postsecondary education and increase enrollment and completion for diverse, underserved student populations.

In March 2020, the Department announced COVID-19 emergency relief measures for eligible student loans, which included suspending of loan payments, freezing interest accrual, and suspending collections activities. The Department will proactively support borrowers during the transition to restart student loan repayments by providing online tools, personalized communications about repayment options, information about loan forgiveness options, and resources to help borrowers choose an affordable repayment plan.

FSA will support this strategic objective.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Increase awareness of the cost of postsecondary education, the impact of student loan debt, median earnings, funding options, and financial aid toolkits through platforms such as the [College Scorecard](#) and the Department's [StudentAid.gov](#) website.
- Increase coordination and outreach efforts with other agencies and state partners to help students and families learn about financial pathways available to meet educational goals and lessen long-term debt.
- Promote institutional awareness of opportunities to support Pell Grant recipients and other underserved groups by collecting and publicizing evidence-based practices and strategies.
- Streamline processes associated with applying for student aid, borrower repayment, and loan forgiveness programs.

- Enhance the services provided by FSA servicers and partners to ensure that student loan borrowers receive timely counsel and are directed toward loan repayment and relief options that meet their circumstances and needs.
- Continue developing a long-term servicing solution that will improve outcomes for student loan borrowers, including increased oversight and accountability of loan servicers.

## Desired Outcomes

- An increased number of students will have access to postsecondary education due to greater awareness of student financial assistance.
- Applicants have a simpler and more streamlined process for completing the [\*Free Application for Federal Student Aid®\*](#) (FAFSA®) form and other federal student aid forms or tools.
- An increased number of eligible borrowers, including civil servants and active-duty service members, are able to apply for loan forgiveness programs (including the [\*Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\) Program\*](#)) with less paperwork and receive decisions in a timely manner.
- An increased number of borrowers have affordable payments.
- Student loan delinquency and default rates are limited.
- Customer satisfaction with federal student aid communications, processes, and services is improved.

## Strategic Objective 4.3

**Increase equitable access to secondary and postsecondary programs that have clear on-ramps to both high-quality jobs and additional high-quality postsecondary educational opportunities.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education**

All students should have access to educational programs that prepare them for postsecondary success and high-quality job opportunities. The Department supports providing streamlined and structured guidance to students and families as they explore and plan postsecondary pathways leading to opportunities for employment in high-growth industries upon completion. Providing students with clear pathways to access postsecondary education will improve the opportunities for success available to them upon completion.

The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and the Office of Postsecondary Education will support this strategic objective.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Support secondary programs in coordinated workplace experiences related to students' career goals and interests that are integrated with instruction and performed in partnership with local businesses and organizations.
- Expand and enhance partnerships between the education community and employers to equitably scale work-based learning opportunities for underserved high school students and adult education students.
- Strengthen connections between the secondary and postsecondary programs offered and high-quality jobs.
- Support the funding of innovative models that support transitions to future educational opportunities and career pathways by connecting youth and young adults with limited or no work experience to summer and year-round jobs and educational opportunities that embed partnerships among employers, workforce investment boards, local educational agencies, and reengagement centers.
- Support states and institutions of higher education in expanding the stackability and portability of postsecondary programs.
- Increase access to programs that provide for the basic needs of adult learners as they pursue educational opportunities and enroll in workforce training programs.

### Desired Outcomes

- There is increased enrollment in and completion rates for programs that lead to in-demand occupations, high-growth industries, and high-quality jobs.
- Educational institutions work in conjunction with employers and high-growth industries to increase students' job-ready skills.

## Strategic Objective 4.4

**Improve the alignment across secondary, postsecondary, and career and technical education programs, including through transparent and effective transition processes, inclusive pathways, and clear credentialing requirements.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education**

The workforce and its requirements are rapidly shifting, and the preexisting equity gaps in access to high-quality postsecondary and career and technical education (CTE) need to be addressed. Effective design, delivery, and diffusion of appropriately aligned CTE programs of study along with [integrated strategies can provide strong systems of supports for both long-term career pathways and financial security](#). Creating more equitable systems of high-quality, flexible college and career pathways that align education with the demands of the 21st-century economy will help narrow disparities in postsecondary completion for underserved communities. The Department will continue to encourage the postsecondary education community to identify and promote degrees and credentials that will meet the economic needs of individuals and the country.

Many college students, particularly those in underserved groups, have struggled to manage or be supported in navigating the [complexities of the transfer process](#) between postsecondary programs. Black and Latino students are significantly less likely than their Asian and White peers to transfer from a two-year to a four-year college. Additionally, students from lower-income backgrounds who begin their postsecondary education at community colleges generally transfer programs at lower rates than students from higher-income backgrounds. Providing students with clear pathways to transition between and within institutions will improve the choices available to students and make postsecondary education and CTE more accessible.

Offices across the Department that support this strategic objective include the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE); the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE); and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

OCTAE oversees the Career, Technical, and Adult Education Institute funding area supporting the implementation strategies of this strategic objective. This funding area includes programs that help students acquire academic and technical skills and prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations in the 21st-century global economy. OPE's Higher Education Programs also help strengthen the capacity of colleges and universities to promote reform, innovation, and improvement in postsecondary education. Additionally, OSERS' Rehabilitation Services programs provide services for individuals with disabilities consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choices so they can prepare for and engage in competitive integrated employment or supported employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with external stakeholders in the education community to promote and implement strategies such as:



- Support states and localities in expanding the opportunity for students to access dual enrollment opportunities, particularly those from communities less likely to have access to those opportunities.
- Establish seamless and transparent transfers of course credits between institutions and from certificate to two-year and four-year degree programs.
- Develop greater understanding of the ongoing challenges preventing more seamless transitions along these educational pathways and the negative impacts caused by these barriers.
- Support states in developing and designing high-quality integrated education and training programs aligned with high-demand career fields.

## Desired Outcomes

- Transparent and diverse pathways in high-quality secondary and postsecondary education prepare students for college, career, and post-enrollment success.
- States and localities increasingly offer the opportunity for adults without a high school diploma or its equivalent to simultaneously pursue basic education and job training programs.
- Processes for students to enroll in and transfer between and within programs and institutions are transparent, widely known, and seamless and allow students—to the maximum extent possible—to earn college academic credits that count toward degrees and certificates.
- Institutions of higher education support students in pursuing multiple pathways to affordable postsecondary credentials and degrees that provide skills that benefit students and have labor market value.



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# STRATEGIC GOAL

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Enhance the Department's internal capacity to optimize the delivery of its mission.

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5



# Strategic Goal 5:

**Enhance the Department's internal capacity to optimize the delivery of its mission.**

**Goal Leader: Assistant Secretary, Office of Finance and Operations**

Effective business management practices are essential to meeting the mission, goals, and objectives of the Department. This Strategic Goal seeks to continuously improve agency operations as the Department manages, engages, and empowers the workforce; purchases products and services; enhances and secures information technology resources; and leverages data to support evidence-based decision-making.

## Strategic Objective 5.1

**Manage information technology as a strategic resource and driver to promote the advancement of the missions executed by the Department's 21st-century workforce.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Chief Information Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer**

The Department aims to evolve its programs and practices by embracing continual improvement of information technology (IT) solutions that advance mission capabilities and positively impact the nation's citizens. The Department's ability to provide world-class technology services to its employees and stakeholders nationwide is necessary in achieving the Department's mission. For this reason, utilizing IT as a strategic resource is critical to ensuring that the Department has the tools necessary to meet the needs of an increasingly mobile workforce and customer base while balancing sophisticated cybersecurity threats. In addition, this strategic objective highlights the strategies the Department will use to provide IT service and engage in continuous improvement to offer solutions to address the real-time requirements of its customers. Over the course of this plan, the Department will work to improve IT governance; deliver reliable, mission-focused IT solutions; strengthen cybersecurity capabilities; and engage, train, and communicate with staff about IT across the Department.

The Office of the Chief Information Officer will support this strategic objective.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will implement strategies such as:

- Strengthen the Department's efficient and effective management of value-added technologies.
- Prioritize the selection of IT modernization initiatives to achieve cost avoidance and cost savings while providing reliable, secure, and mission-focused IT solutions.
- Evolve the Department's cybersecurity capabilities.
- Improve the capacity of the Department's workforce to employ IT resources for greater mission impact.
- Fully execute the [\*21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act\*](#) to improve customer experience for educational services available to the public.

### Desired Outcomes

- Department stakeholders will be provided with IT resources that can be leveraged as a strategic asset while ensuring technology systems and services acquired are safe, secure, customer-focused, and accessible.
- Cybersecurity is strengthened by mitigation efforts to lower risks, provide effective responses to tangible threats and breaches, and protect vital information and data that ensure mission cyber-risk viability of the Department.
- There is an enhanced ability to support various digital service platforms that provide end-users with evolving emerging technology needs using best-in-class user interfaces and

standards that can be made available to the public via online, mobile-friendly services that improve the customer experience and reduce costs.

- An infrastructure platform is implemented that enables the delivery of an enterprise website that is modernized and compliant with the mandates of the *21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act*, including the accessibility requirements of the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#).

## Strategic Objective 5.2

**Strengthen agency-wide data governance and build capacity to improve data access, data management, and enterprise data analytics in support of agency goals.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Chief Data Officer, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development**

The Department's Data Strategy addresses new and emerging mandates, such as open data by default, interagency data sharing, data standardization, and other principles found in the [Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018](#) and the [Federal Data Strategy](#). Recent statutory authorities, advancements in technology, and heightened expectations of government performance are charting a course for long-term data maturity. The Department's Data Strategy goals are interdependent with cross-cutting objectives requiring a collaborative effort across Department offices. The evolving nature of the Department's data tasks necessitates a focus on developing a workforce with skills commensurate with a modern data culture in a digital age and that safely and securely provides access for researchers.

All Department offices support this strategic objective.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will implement strategies such as:

- Strengthen agency-wide data governance to better connect data management with broader organizational governance.
- Develop and launch an enterprise data repository and analytics platform to empower Department analysts to develop new, actionable insights from data to improve policies, programs, and operations.
- Develop and implement a data management investment and capital planning process to ensure that data-related projects align with Department-wide data priorities and increase efficiencies.
- Improve the completeness, accuracy, and other dimensions of data quality from the Department's grantees and subrecipients and ensure that the grants management system supports strategic data use.
- Increase states' access to data that highlights gaps in participation and outcomes for career and technical students by gender, race/ethnicity, and special population status (e.g., economically disadvantaged individuals, English learners, and individuals with disabilities).
- Build capacity to leverage education data throughout the Department's workforce by operationalizing a data workforce plan, growing its Data Professionals Community of Practice, expanding its Data Literacy Program, and developing professional pathways and training curricula for staff.

### Desired Outcomes

- Data governance and human capacity are strengthened.
- Data management and enterprise data analytics are improved.



- There is improved data access, transparency, and privacy, expanding the Department's ability to generate evidence to inform policy and influence program decisions.
- There is increased efficiency through Department-led, privacy-protective, mutually advantageous interagency data-sharing initiatives.
- A comprehensive Department Open Data plan is implemented and released.

## Strategic Objective 5.3

**Recruit, retain, and develop the workforce needed to meet the Department's mission now and into the future.**

**Strategic Objective Leader: Chief Human Capital Officer, Office of Finance and Operations**

Implementation of workforce planning will allow the Department to align workforce requirements with its mission and Strategic Goals, develop a comprehensive picture of where gaps exist, implement strategies to close workforce staffing and competency gaps, and increase workforce diversity. The Department will use meaningful human resources data and analysis as part of a data-driven human capital strategy to support informed business decisions and to ensure the Department has a mission-ready, high-performing, and engaged workforce.

All Department offices support this strategic objective.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with stakeholders to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Implement workforce planning to strategically and systematically close workforce gaps.
- Optimize hiring practices to achieve effective staffing levels.
- Address competency gaps within the Department's workforce by implementing competency models, conducting competency assessments, and aligning training plans to competency gap closures.
- Improve employee engagement through implementation of the Department's National Engagement Strategy and Principal Operating Component engagement action plans.

### Desired Outcomes

- Improved workforce planning maturity moves the Department from planning headcount and capacity toward integrated talent management.
- There is a decrease in the time it takes to hire an employee, which helps achieve effective staffing levels.
- Competency gaps are closed, with a focus on mission-critical occupations, which improves workforce proficiency and performance.
- There is increased employee engagement, which supports improved retention, productivity, and morale.

## Strategic Objective 5.4

**Deliver mission outcomes and value for taxpayers through efficient acquisition management and proactive industry partnerships while promoting small businesses.**

**Objective Leader: Deputy Chief Acquisition Officer, Office of Finance and Operations**

The Department engages industry as a strategic partner to support the delivery of mission outcomes. By leveraging industry capabilities and innovations, the Department achieves better results for taxpayers while promoting the health of the economy. The Department strives to ensure procurement opportunities are available on an equal basis to all eligible small businesses (especially those that are disadvantaged and in underserved communities) to maximize small business participation in Department contracts. The Department also aims to set the standard for acquisition management to ensure efficient and effective operations.

All Department offices support this strategic objective.

### Implementation Strategies

To achieve this strategic objective, the Department will support and collaborate with stakeholders to promote and implement strategies such as:

- Improve the acquisition management program by implementing a formal governance structure and strengthening strategic decision-making throughout the acquisition life cycle, including long-term small business growth strategies.
- Modernize acquisition systems to inform decisions and improve the efficiency of operations.
- Continuously improve the Department's acquisition processes through the use of data to reduce transaction costs and improve customer outcomes.
- Promote equitable access to contracting opportunities and reduce barriers for small businesses to partner with the Department in the delivery of core mission services.
- Increase opportunities for new small businesses to exceed the Department's small business and small disadvantaged business contracting goals.
- Expand training and outreach efforts to increase small business set aside baseline spending each fiscal year to promote more set aside opportunities for small and disadvantaged businesses.
- Attract and educate small businesses on Department contracting opportunities and its mission through outreach and industry days. Engage large businesses to increase partnerships with small businesses to encourage procurement equity.
- Strengthen training and engagement of contracting officers and specialists, contracting officer representatives, and program managers to implement the Department's acquisition strategies and achieve mission outcomes.

## Desired Outcomes

- The Department's prime contracting and subcontracting goals are met or exceeded by reducing potential procurement barriers and increasing procurement opportunities for small, underserved, and disadvantaged businesses.
- Spend Under Management contracting goals are met or exceeded by increasing small business utilization in strategic business functions and leveraging Department- and government-wide contract vehicles through category management.
- Procurement Action Lead Times are overall reduced while sustaining a highly engaged acquisition workforce through innovative contracting approaches, technology enhancements, and process improvements that reduce burden and increase value for Department programs.

# Capacity Assessment Summary

Section 101 of the [\*Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018\*](#) amends U.S.C. Title V to require agency Evaluation Officers to “continually assess the coverage, quality, methods, consistency, effectiveness, independence, and balance of the portfolio of evaluations, policy research, and ongoing evaluation activities of the agency” and requires that assessments be reported in each agency’s Strategic Plan. The most recent version of that assessment appears in Appendix B of this Strategic Plan.

The assessment covers the following six elements:

1. List of activities and operations currently being evaluated and analyzed by the Department.
2. Extent to which these activities meet the needs of the Department’s operating components.
3. Extent to which these activities meet the Department’s learning, management, and accountability needs.
4. Extent to which these activities use appropriate analytic methods.
5. Extent to which these activities are supported by agency capacity for effective planning, execution, and dissemination.
6. Extent to which these activities are supported by agency capacity for effective use of evaluation evidence and data for analysis.

# Appendix A. FY 2022 and FY 2023 Agency Priority Goals

Agency Priority Goals (APGs) state results to be achieved in a 24-month period. The successful achievement of the Department’s APGs depends predominantly on agency execution. Demonstrating performance relies, in part, on the effective use of high-quality and timely data, including appropriate design of performance indicators and evaluations and the appropriate use of allocated resources. Quarterly updates for APGs are available at [Performance.Gov](https://performance.gov).

The Department identified three APGs for fiscal year (FY) 2022 and FY 2023 that reflect the top implementation-focused performance improvement priorities of Department leadership and the Administration and are consistent with this Strategic Plan. The APGs, which are aligned to the national priority to advance educational equity, focus on addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively managing federal student loans, and managing disparities in attainment of high-quality degrees and credentials.

These APGs and their related strategic objectives are provided in the following table. A detailed discussion of each, including evidence building, is presented in the following sections.

APG	Related Strategic Objective
<p><b>APG 1: Address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, educators, and faculty.</b></p> <p><b>Impact Statement:</b> The Department will be a leader and partner in addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in educational areas.</p> <p><b>Achievement Statement:</b> By September 30, 2023, the Department will respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to continuously provide for high-quality educational environments and capabilities by supporting state educational agencies, local educational agencies, and institutions of higher education to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to support schools in maintaining safe, fully in-person instructions for students.</li> <li>• Utilize COVID-19 relief funds on appropriate, effective, and evidence-based activities to reengage students, address lost instructional time, and improve educational opportunities by offering 300+ Department-led technical assistance engagements.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategic Objective 1.1:</b> Prioritize the equitable and adequate distribution of resources to communities of concentrated poverty in an effort to provide underserved students with high-quality educational opportunities.</p> <p><b>Strategic Objective 1.2:</b> Ensure all students have access to well-rounded, rigorous, engaging, and diverse learning opportunities and environments to support their success in school.</p> <p><b>Strategic Objective 3.1:</b> Support the development and implementation of multitiered systems of supports to increase students’ engagement; social, emotional, and mental health; well-being; and academic success.</p> <p><b>Strategic Objective 3.2:</b> Foster supportive, inclusive, and identity-safe learning environments and ensure the individual needs of underserved students are met through appropriately designed instruction, evidence-based practices, and related supports and services.</p>



<p><b>APG 2: Effectively manage federal student loans.</b></p> <p><b>Impact Statement:</b> The Department will provide effective customer service for borrowers to simplify the student loan repayment process.</p> <p><b>Achievement Statement:</b> By September 30, 2023, Federal Student Aid will improve loan servicer quality and accuracy to levels at or above 95 percent, as defined in student loan servicer agreements.</p>	<p><b>Strategic Objective 4.2:</b> Improve the administration of student aid programs to help eligible students receive aid; support borrowers in successfully repaying their loans, claiming loan forgiveness benefits, and mitigating student loan default; and hold contractors accountable.</p>
<p><b>APG 3: Reduce disparities in attainment of high-quality degrees and credentials.</b></p> <p><b>Impact Statement:</b> The Department will support institutions and states to assist low-income students and students of color to enroll in and complete high-quality postsecondary education programs, including at community colleges and through career and technical training.</p> <p><b>Achievement Statement:</b> By September 30, 2023, the Department will increase the number and diversity of higher education grant applicants from community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribally Controlled Colleges or Universities, Minority-Serving Institutions, and public four-year colleges by 5 percent to support and assist low-income students and students of color in attaining improved educational outcomes.</p>	<p><b>Strategic Objective 4.1:</b> Support educational institutions and state systems in efforts to raise academic quality and college completion for all students, especially for underserved students, such as first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students with disabilities.</p> <p><b>Strategic Objective 4.2:</b> Improve the administration of student aid programs to help eligible students receive aid; support borrowers in successfully repaying their loans, claiming loan forgiveness benefits, and mitigating student loan default; and hold contractors accountable.</p>

## Agency Priority Goal 1: Address the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students, Educators, and Faculty

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to continue to deepen divides in educational opportunity across the nation's classrooms and campuses if its disparate impacts are not adequately addressed. Studies show that, for many students, the educational gaps that existed before the pandemic (e.g., opportunities, access, supports, achievement, and other outcomes) are widening. These impacts are falling disproportionately on underserved students with the fewest opportunities. In FY 2022 and FY 2023, the Department will focus on addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, educators, and faculty.

### Building Evidence

As detailed further in its FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department is building evidence related to the COVID-19 pandemic across two primary focuses.

First, the Department seeks to better understand the current impact of the pandemic on students, educators, and communities and the response of the education system. Examples of work in this area include the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES') National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) 2021 School Survey and School Pulse Survey, pre- and post-pandemic data that will be coming out of NAEP in 2022, along with ongoing data collection and dissemination by the Department's Office of the Chief Data Officer on the distribution and use of federal recovery funds. Additional examples include data from IES' National Center for Education Statistics on changes within regular system measures as well as findings from the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance's [\*Implementation of Key Federal Education Policies in the Wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic\*](#).

Second, the Department seeks to understand what policies, programs, practices, and services are effective in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact. Offices across the Department are invested in research and development aimed at generating knowledge about meeting students' social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs. Notable examples include investments by IES focused on identifying effective local practices in recovery, leveraging the power of artificial intelligence, and supporting students with disabilities and other underserved students.

## Agency Priority Goal 2: Effectively Manage Federal Student Loans

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act* and subsequent actions temporarily suspended payments on millions of student loans until May 1, 2022. Federal Student Aid is implementing a comprehensive plan to seamlessly return millions of borrowers back to active repayment status. As the Department conducts outreach to borrowers, there is an opportunity to assist them in choosing an affordable repayment plan, rehabilitate their student loans if previously in default, and provide information on how to apply for student loan forgiveness programs. In FY 2022 and FY 2023, the Department will focus on improving the management of the federal student loan program.

## **Building Evidence**

To support this APG, the Department is focused on building evidence to demonstrate tangible improvements to the design and delivery of federal student aid programs. Work is expected to center on tangible improvements to the customer experience and gaining a better understanding of how best to support borrowers in successfully managing their student loan debt.

## **Agency Priority Goal 3: Reduce Disparities in Attainment of High-Quality Degrees and Credentials**

The nation must boost completion and attainment rates across all levels of postsecondary education, especially for underserved students. Preexisting equity gaps in access to high-quality postsecondary education, including career and technical education, dual enrollment, and work-based learning, have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In FY 2022 and FY 2023, the Department will focus on reducing disparities in attainment of high-quality degrees and credentials.

## **Building Evidence**

To support this APG, the Department is building evidence about policies, programs, practices, and services that fall in two broad domains: (1) equitable access to education and training after high school and (2) equitable completion of those programs. Special emphasis is being placed on meeting the needs of students who have been historically underserved by postsecondary education. Relevant activities may include building evidence about the efficacy of strategies that can be deployed within existing college access programs (e.g., Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs and Federal TRIO Programs) or the outcomes of those programs themselves; institutional capacity-building efforts to support under-resourced colleges and universities in meeting their academic missions; innovative approaches to supporting college completion, including evaluating promising practices at scale; and systemic approaches to institutional transformation designed to yield dramatic improvements in student outcomes.

# Appendix B. FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda

## Introduction

If ever there has been a time when high-quality evidence about how to strengthen the nation’s education system was needed, it is now. The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to long-standing inequities in the resources communities have to address the public health crisis; pivot effectively to hybrid or remote learning; and support the well-being of students, educators, and families as the pandemic threw into disarray all aspects of life and work. Although additional data are needed to understand the full impact of the pandemic, several reports suggest students belonging to populations that were already underserved have borne the brunt of its effects.

Recovery—and then building a better education system that more equitably, efficiently, and effectively meets the needs of every student—is a critical challenge for educators and education policymakers alike. It requires better, more granular, and more timely evidence about what is happening in schools and communities; new insights into what works to improve student outcomes; an increased awareness of how to scale what works and to support states and districts in using effective practices; and an increased use of evidence to continuously improve the Department’s programs.

Importantly, evidence, promising innovation, and exploration must be a central focus of the Department’s work. Taken together, they are the initial stages of a larger evidence-building pipeline. That pipeline encourages the development of novel evidence-based strategies, adaptations of those strategies in response to emerging evidence of promise, and the application of successively more rigorous evidence-building techniques to evaluate the capacity to improve student outcomes. Several Department offices and programs, including the Grants Policy Office, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (OESE’s) Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Program, and the Institute of Education Sciences’ (IES’) field-initiated grants and data collections (e.g., the National Assessment of Education Progress’ (NAEP’s) 2021 School Survey and School Pulse Study), already incorporate elements of this pipeline into their approaches to evidence building.

The *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018* encourages all federal agencies to build and use evidence in support of fulfilling their missions and improving agency operations. In this Fiscal Year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department proposes six focus areas for evidence building that are critical to strengthening the nation’s education system. By building evidence in these areas, the Department will be better able to ensure every student has access to high-quality learning opportunities that meet their unique needs. Consistent with the Department’s Strategic Goals and Agency Priority Goals (APGs), the Department’s six focus areas include:

<b>Focus Area 1:</b>	Address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, educators, and faculty.
<b>Focus Area 2:</b>	Promote equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and inclusive environments.
<b>Focus Area 3:</b>	Support a diverse and talented educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning.
<b>Focus Area 4:</b>	Meet students’ social, emotional, and academic needs.
<b>Focus Area 5:</b>	Increase postsecondary value by focusing on equity-conscious strategies to address affordability, completion, post-enrollment success, and support for inclusive institutions.
<b>Focus Area 6:</b>	Effectively manage federal student aid programs.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Portions of this FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda that relate to reopening, recovery, and renewal in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have been informed by substantial Department outreach to stakeholders in the early days of the Biden–Harris Administration, including educators, education policymakers, state and local leaders, education researchers and related organizations, and advocacy organizations. Components specifically related to federal student aid are informed by outreach to academic researchers, federal student aid advocates, and staff across the executive branch.

Contemporaneously with the development of the Department’s Strategic Plan, the Department published a [Request for Information](#) in the *Federal Register* to solicit feedback on the Learning Agenda’s six focus areas. The Department received more than 30 comments, including from individuals, universities, university-based researchers, philanthropies, advocates, and advocacy organizations.

Although a substantial portion of that feedback was consistent with the Department’s proposed areas of emphasis—most notably supporting an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that supports the learning and development of all students—some stakeholders raised themes that are not pronounced in this version of the Learning Agenda (e.g., early childhood education). Importantly, the Department considers this Learning Agenda a “living document.” Following its initial publication, the Department will continue its stakeholder outreach efforts and internal discussions to further refine it. The most up-to-date version of this Learning Agenda will be available at <https://www.ed.gov/data>.

Finally, needs-sensing activities revealed that several national associations and advocacy organizations had developed—or had plans to develop—learning agendas specific to their area of interest. To the extent that those learning agendas are broadly consistent with Department’s interests and goals (e.g., tutoring and summer learning), the Department looks forward to exploring opportunities for collaboration.

# Focus Area 1:

Address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, educators, and faculty.

## Alignment to Agency Strategy

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APG 1:	Address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, educators, and faculty.
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## Background

Although the full extent of COVID-19's impact on the nation's education system and its students has yet to be fully understood, the breadth and depth of its effects are coming into view. At the elementary and secondary education levels, evidence from formative assessment providers suggests that [achievement in the wake of the pandemic lags](#) that which would have otherwise been expected. Worryingly, the [net effect](#) appears to be an exacerbation of existing gaps in equity, disadvantaging student groups that were already underserved. At the nation's colleges and universities, an analysis of [year-on-year enrollment trends](#) suggests many students delayed or paused their studies. Here too, there are signs of the pandemic's differential impact, where some of the [greatest enrollment declines were noted](#) among college students who were Black or Brown or who attended community colleges.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, Congress made historic investments in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Describing how states, districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) used those funds in service of reopening and recovery is of interest to policymakers and taxpayers alike.

## Priority Learning Questions

The Department proposes a series of priority learning questions (PLQs) related to this focus area, which align with APG 1. Given the differential impact of the pandemic on underserved students and the schools and institutions that serve them, findings from these PLQs should be disaggregated when possible and appropriate. These PLQs are:

- 1.1 To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic been associated with changes in students' opportunities to learn and achievement at all levels of education, particularly for the most underserved students, and how have those conditions changed as the nation shifts to recovery? (*APG 1*)
- 1.2 How have states, school districts, and IHEs used federal funds administered by the Department to support reopening and recovery, and what is the relationship between those uses and important student outcomes of interest (e.g., student engagement, student achievement, retention, and attainment), particularly for the most underserved students? (*APG 1*)
- 1.3 What policies, programs, services, and practices effectively engage students with their



schools in their learning in efforts to support their social and emotional well-being and mental health and in other services those schools provide, both generally and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic? (*APG 1*)

- 1.4 What policies, programs, services, and practices effectively accelerate student learning in core academic subjects in elementary and secondary education, including reading, mathematics, science, and English language arts in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic? (*APG 1*; also see *PLQ 4.3*, which deals more generally with supporting student achievement)
- 1.5 What policies, programs, services, and practices effectively support the professional practice and general well-being of educators, faculty, and other instructional leaders in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic? (*APG 1*)

## Short-Term Activities

The Department began a series of data collections to address PLQ 1.1 and portions of PLQ 1.2. This includes new survey research conducted by IES' National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and its National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) and both new and existing annual reporting requirements coordinated by the Office of the Chief Data Officer (OCDO) and NCES. Specifically, this work includes [NAEP's The Nation's Report Card](#), NCEE's forthcoming [Implementation of Key Federal Education Policies in the Wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic](#) and [Study of District and School Uses of Federal Education Funds](#), and OCDO's [Education Stabilization Fund Public Transparency Portal](#).

IES' National Center for Education Research (NCER) has funded several field-initiated grants that are also related to PLQ 1.1. They include [Understanding Pennsylvania's Educational Inequities in the time of COVID-19](#), [Equity in Virginia's Public Education System: A Longitudinal Examination Spanning the COVID-19 Shutdown](#), and [Children's Longitudinal Development from Pre-K through High School as Disrupted by COVID-19](#).

Work related to PLQ 1.3—in particular, the role of families in student engagement—is underway as part of NCEE's [Evaluating Implementation of the Statewide Family Engagement Centers Program](#) study.

Finally, NCES has awarded supplemental funding to 10 Statewide Longitudinal Data System grantee states to support efforts to respond to data and data system needs resulting from the pandemic. Projects funded through these supplemental awards include exploring impacts on family literacy and college access, identifying the status of students' internet access and digital devices, and understanding the school-level capacity to support online learning.

## Long-Term Activities

PLQs related to the potential impact of federal education funds on student or institutional outcomes (PLQ 1.2); policies, programs, services, and practices associated with successfully reengaging students (PLQ 1.3); and the accelerating of their learning in core academic subjects (PLQ 1.4) are addressable primarily in the long term. This is due, in part, to the lag in relevant student outcome data (see the Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions section for this

focus area). It is also because rigorous evidence-building activities take time to design, procure, implement, and evaluate.

To that end, IES has already begun work on a series of long-term research and development activities related to pandemic recovery. Exemplar activities include a collaboration with the National Science Foundation to fund research on the use of cutting-edge artificial intelligence technologies to improve services for students with disabilities; NCER's [Research Networks Focused on Critical Problems of Education Policy and Practice](#) and [Improving Pandemic Recovery Efforts in Education Agencies](#); two [IES Learning Acceleration Challenges](#) focused on improving upper elementary mathematics performance for student with disabilities and middle school science performance among the lowest-performing students; the National Center for Special Education Research's (NCSEER's) [Research to Accelerate Pandemic Recovery in Special Education](#) grants program; NCER's [Using Longitudinal Data to Support State Education Recovery Policymaking](#) competition; an anticipated NCEE *Impact Study of Using Technology to Accelerate Math Learning*; and the forthcoming School Pulse Panel, which will replace the 2021 NAEP School Survey described previously.

The Department continues to consider evidence-building activities related to educator well-being, as described in PLQ 1.5.

Finally, when appropriate, the Department will consider the use of the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities in grant competitions relevant to this focus area. This includes the use of evidence in project design and grantee evidence building.

## **Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions**

The greatest challenge facing evidence-building activities in this area concerns the availability of student outcome data. These data are not systematically available to the Department, largely due to pandemic-related assessment waivers. When assessment data are available, there is often substantial lag between the assessment's administration and its availability for analysis at the Department level. As a result, some questions may not be able to be answered at the national level, in a timely manner, or both, which may hamper some policy considerations.

Grant and contract-funded research conducted at state and local educational agencies that have continued to collect and store formative (interim) or summative assessment data provide one window into pandemic recovery. More information about students' performance in the wake of the COVID pandemic will be generated by upcoming analyses of data recently collected by NAEP or an inability of existing district and state data systems to collect and store information that could complement student summative assessments (e.g., diagnostic assessment data).

# Focus Area 2:

Promote equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and inclusive environments.

## Alignment to Agency Strategy

Strategic Objective 1.1:	Prioritize the equitable and adequate distribution of resources to communities of concentrated poverty in an effort to provide underserved students with high-quality educational opportunities.
Strategic Objective 1.3:	Support states, school districts, and institutions of higher education to promote and protect students' nondiscriminatory and equal access to education, as provided by Federal civil rights laws.

## Background

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing body of evidence has suggested that certain student populations have been underserved by the nation's education system. There is evidence that this includes, but extends well beyond, disparities in student achievement on federal or state assessments. Evidence from the Department's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), for example, suggests that:

- Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native students are [more likely to attend schools with concentrations of inexperienced teachers](#) than their White and Asian peers.
- Black students and students with disabilities are [disproportionately subjected to seclusion, restraint, and exclusionary discipline](#).
- Black and Latino students as well as students with disabilities [often have less access to and participate less frequently in](#) rigorous courses that prepare students for college and careers.
- Students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners (ELs) are disproportionately held back in high school, which may decrease their odds for subsequent postsecondary success.

Similarly, [research has highlighted additional disparities](#)—like funding between districts within a single state—that tend to systematically disadvantage students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. [Newly available data on school-level per-pupil spending](#) makes it possible to explore the extent to which those patterns hold true within districts.

## Priority Learning Questions

The Department proposes to prioritize a series of PLQs related to this focus area, which are in alignment with strategic objectives 1.1 and 1.3. These PLQs are:

- 2.1. To what extent, and for what reasons, do the nation’s learners experience inequities in access to, participation in, or the outcomes of education programs and services supported by the Department? (*strategic objective 1.1*)
- 2.2. What policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in ensuring all students have equitable access to resources and resulting opportunities to learn supporting academic achievement and readiness for college and careers? (*strategic objective 1.1*)
- 2.3. What policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in building safe, well-disciplined, and supportive learning environments that protect the emotional and physical well-being of all learners and are free of discrimination? (*strategic objective 1.3*)

## Short-Term Activities

Several short-term activities support the Department’s efforts to address PLQ 2.1. The Department collected [2021–2022 CRDC](#) data in winter 2021–2022. These data will provide a critical update to a wide range of measures that will help the Department better characterize the state of equity in the nation’s schools, districts, and states. Simultaneously, a Department working group focused on the implementation of President Biden’s [Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) is currently cataloging available resources to build a public-facing equity dashboard based on the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s 2019 [Developing Indicators of Educational Equity project](#). Other notable data collections, including those related to states’, districts’, and IHEs’ use of recovery and other federal education funds, also include one or more items specifically related to equity and maintenance of equity.

Assessing and understanding equity in student access to educational resources and opportunities to learn is a focus of multiple research studies funded by IES. For example, with NCER funding, the [Oregon Department of Education](#) is examining whether their On-Track to Graduation initiative, established in 2016–2017, is linked to more equitable outcomes for their high school students. NCER’s long-standing investment in [research focused on ELs](#) has contributed to the Department’s understanding of equal access for this population of students, including how policies and practices affect academic outcomes. A meta-analytic study due to be completed by summer 2022 will provide information on the degree to which the [timing of reclassification of ELs](#) affects student education outcomes.

NCSEER has both completed and ongoing research to address disparities in special education. This includes the development and testing of interventions to reduce racial/ethnic disproportionality in school discipline and special education referrals and a study examining whether and to what extent disparities in disability identification have changed over time in the United States. The latter explores disabilities generally and for specific conditions; the school-, district-, and state-level characteristics that relate to these disparities; and whether receipt of special education services is associated with increased academic achievement, behavior, and socio-emotional functioning.

## Long-Term Activities

The Department has several evidence-building activities underway related to better understanding how to ensure all students have access to the resources they need to achieve their full potential (PLQ 2.2) and safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments (PLQ 2.3).

In FY 2019, NCEE launched [The Effects of a Systematic Approach to Improving Quality in Afterschool Programs: An Impact Evaluation to Inform the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program](#), designed to provide safe and supportive learning environments that promote social and emotional skills, particularly among students who have been underserved.

NCER has made a series of investments focused on ELs' access to high-quality instruction (PLQ 2.2). It is supporting two national research and development centers that were launched in FY 2020, are located at [WestEd](#) and the [University of Houston](#), and are addressing the needs of ELs in secondary settings. These centers are examining the degree to which course-taking patterns and systems-level policies support or impede ELs' access to the general curriculum and advanced course-taking in secondary school. The centers are examining policies in Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas. By FY 2025, the two centers will have developed and tested curricular materials and professional development models for English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science designed to ensure ELs are simultaneously learning critical content and English.

IES has recently awarded a series of research grants through both NCER and NCSER that are responsive to building evidence related to PLQ 2.3. Of particular note is an NCSER-funded [network of projects studying multitiered systems of supports](#) that integrate both academic and behavioral supports to address the needs of children with, or at risk for, disabilities. This work complements existing impact studies that identify students who need additional supports to be successful in general education classroom, including NCEE's [Evaluation of Preschool Special Education Practices](#) and [Impact Evaluation of Training in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Reading in Early Elementary School](#). As noted in the Department's forthcoming Annual Evaluation Plan, the Department also anticipates developing a new Impact Evaluation of Training and Assistance for Staff Supporting Students with Disabilities in the General Education Classroom.

Finally, when appropriate, the Department will consider the use of the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities in grant competitions relevant to this focus area. This includes the use of evidence in project design and grantee evidence building.

## Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions

The Department's preliminary scan of data available to fully implement its planned Equity Dashboard suggests that several elements may not currently be available through the Department's existing data collections, most notably those related to equitable access to high-quality early learning programs and readiness for kindergarten. As the project moves forward, the Department will explore the extent to which it has the authority needed to collect those and other equity-related data or whether they may be available from other federal or nonfederal

sources so that they do not represent persistent gaps in the Department's understanding of education equity.



# Focus Area 3:

Support a diverse and talented educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning.

## Alignment to Agency Strategy

Strategic Objective 2.1:	Strengthen and diversify the educator pipeline and workforce.
Strategic Objective 2.2:	Identify and promote evidence-based practices or strategies that support diverse districts (including rural districts) with high rates of poverty in recruiting, selecting, preparing, and retaining well-qualified (including in-field fully certified) and effective teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, and specialized instructional support personnel.
Strategic Objective 2.3:	Support the professional growth, retention, and advancement of talented, experienced educators and other school personnel and their capacity to meet the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of underserved students.

## Background

Teachers are essential to the learning and development of the students they serve. However, mounting evidence suggests that the educator workforce faces a number of challenges that place the success of students—particularly those who have been underserved by education systems—at risk. First, [evidence from states](#) suggests that many are experiencing significant teacher shortages, particularly in mathematics, science, career and technical education (CTE), and special education. Problems arising from teacher shortages are exacerbated by a second concern: inequities in the distribution of well-qualified teachers within and across school districts and schools. [Evidence suggests](#) schools in communities experiencing poverty and those that enroll higher proportions of students of color are more likely to employ teachers with fewer years' experience, who are not fully certified, or who are not certified in the subject area in which they are currently teaching. Finally, the teacher workforce does not reflect the [racial and ethnic diversity](#) of the nation's student body, though we know that educator diversity benefits all students.

## Priority Learning Questions

The Department proposes a series of PLQs related to this focus area, which align with strategic objectives 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. These PLQs are:

- 3.1. What policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in preparing, recruiting, and retaining a well-qualified educator workforce that is (1) equitably distributed within and across school districts and schools, particularly with respect to educators working in districts with high rates of poverty and rural districts, in high-demand fields (*strategic objective 2.2*) and (2) prepared to provide underserved students the social, emotional, academic, and other supports they need to be successful in work and life? (*strategic objective 2.3*)

- 3.2. How can the education workforce come to reflect the diversity of the nation’s learners?  
(strategic objective 2.1)

## Short-Term Activities

Activities within NCEE and OESE’s Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) Program are building (and will continue to build) evidence related to PLQ 3.1. Notably, NCEE is nearing completion of its [Impact Study of Feedback for Teachers Based on Classroom Videos](#). This randomized control trial focuses on the efficacy of virtual coaching to improve classroom management, instructional practice, and student achievement. The ongoing work of the SEED Program is notable because, unlike some Department grant programs, SEED grantees are required to develop project evaluations that are consistent with What Works Clearinghouse standards, which are capable of generating “moderate” or “strong” evidence per the *Every Student Succeeds Act*. Relevant SEED Program projects include those focusing on the teacher pipeline (PLQ 3.2) as well as improved instructional approaches, including developing culturally responsive learning environments; strengthening social and emotional learning; and supporting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics instruction.

NCSEER grantees are [investigating the preservice experience of special educators](#) and how it relates to teacher workforce entry and retention as well as the academic outcomes of the students with disabilities they teach. The findings will help determine how teacher education programs can better support special education teacher candidates and prevent the high level of turnover experienced among these professionals.

NCER has recently funded several new research projects explicitly addressing PLQ 3.1. One new award to the [Massachusetts Department of Education](#) is examining the extent to which Massachusetts’ preparation and licensing systems prepare teachers to be effective in improving outcomes for students of color. Another project is exploring the [characteristics of cooperating teachers](#) to the later outcomes of the student teachers they supervise. Another is seeking to understand how to get the most useful [information from professional references for teacher applicants](#) at the time of hiring. Two other new projects are explicitly examining [what teachers need to learn and do](#) to adequately teach students of color.

NCES is currently processing pandemic-specific information collected within the [2020–2021 National Teacher and Principal Survey \(NTPS\)](#) and collecting additional data from teachers, which include a sample of public and private school principals and teachers and, importantly for PLQ 3.2, detailed demographic information about building leaders and classroom educators. NTPS is the Department’s only source of information about the demographic characteristics of teachers. The absence of district- or school-level data complicates making strong conclusions about the extent to which there are differences in the racial/ethnic composition of school communities and the educators who are a part of them.

## Long-Term Activities

Work is ongoing at NCEE to build evidence related to PLQ 3.1 through its [Impact Evaluation of Teacher Residency Programs](#). In this randomized control trial, students will be randomly

assigned to instructors prepared in residency or nonresidency programs. Student outcomes (including achievement) and educator outcomes (including retention) will be studied.

NCEE is also building evidence related to PLQ 3.1 through a larger [Impact Evaluation to Inform the Teacher and Student Leader \(TSL\) Incentive Program](#). Using data from 2017 TSL grantees, this study will explore the program's implementation with an emphasis on the use of teacher leaders. Separately, a group of districts and schools have been recruited to implement a specific teacher leader model similar to the one used by 2017 TSL grantees. This randomized control trial will allow the Department to estimate the impacts of a popular educator development strategy on both student and educator outcomes, including retention.

NCSEER has funded two grants focused on the prevention of burnout and improvement of instructional quality among special educators. One grant is [adapting and testing an existing burnout intervention](#) for special educators and another is [evaluating an evidence-based and commercially available program](#) to determine whether it has beneficial effects for special educators and their students with disabilities. NCSEER is also supporting grants focused on professional development for paraprofessionals. One such project involves [developing and testing a professional development package](#) to train supervising teachers to utilize coaching to improve paraprofessionals' instruction for students with developmental disabilities. Another involves [evaluating the efficacy of a coaching intervention](#) to determine whether it improves paraprofessionals' behavioral intervention practices and the behavioral and academic outcomes of students with or at risk for externalizing behavior disorders.

Notably, the education workforce includes individuals within the education sciences who are engaged daily in the generation of evidence to support education practice. NCER has been systematically attempting to diversify the workforce within the education sciences through its research training investments. In addition to requiring that IES pre- and post-doctoral training programs include a plan for recruiting diverse fellows, NCER supports two programs specifically focused on diversifying the education science community. The [Pathways to the Education Sciences Research Training Program](#) grants are awarded to Minority-Serving Institutions and their partners to create education research training programs that prepare fellows for doctoral study. As of fall 2020, about 70 percent of the participating fellows identified as non-White. Since the program was launched in FY 2016, about 60 percent of the program's alumni have gone on to graduate study. In addition, NCER recently invited applications to its newest training program, [Early Career Mentoring Program for Faculty at Minority Serving Institutions](#).

Finally, when appropriate, the Department will consider the use of the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities in grant competitions relevant to this focus area. This includes the use of evidence in project design and grantee evidence building.

## Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions

The primary challenge facing generating evidence on the diversity of the teacher pipeline (PLQ 3.2) is the lack of data at the federal level on educators' race/ethnicity. Although the Departments' *EDFacts* system currently collects the number and qualification of teachers—and the number of various support staff—race/ethnicity is not collected for any school staff. As a result, it is impossible to align data on the race/ethnicity of students in a school or district with

the educators who serve them. This is an area of exploration for the Department in the coming year. For example, NCES has other collections with data important to PLQ 3.2 and is exploring partnerships that could improve the school- or district-level data.

# Focus Area 4:

Meet students' social, emotional, and academic needs.

## Alignment to Agency Strategy

<b>Strategic Objective 3.1:</b>	Support the development and implementation of multitiered systems of supports to increase students' engagement; social, emotional, and mental health; well-being; and academic success.
<b>Strategic Objective 3.2:</b>	Foster supportive, inclusive, and identity-safe learning environments and ensure the individual needs of underserved students are met through appropriately designed instruction, evidence-based practices, and related supports and services.
<b>Strategic Objective 3.3:</b>	Strengthen learning environments, support professional development, and improve educator credentialing for emergent bilingual students and multilingual learners.
<b>Strategic Objective 4.4:</b>	Improve the alignment across secondary, postsecondary, and career and technical education programs, including through transparent and effective transition processes, inclusive pathways, and clear credentialing requirements.

## Background

Learning and development across students' life spans include several deeply interrelated factors, including each individual's social, emotional, academic, and career development. Prior [research](#) suggests that attending to each, in particular those related to social and emotional learning (SEL), may be a promising strategy for improving a wide range of outcomes for all students. For groups that have been underserved by education systems, prioritizing access to programs and services shown to bolster SEL, academic achievement, and career development may be particularly important.

## Priority Learning Questions

The Department proposes to prioritize a series of PLQs related to this focus area, which are in alignment with strategic objectives 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 4.4. These PLQs are:

- 4.1. What policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in promoting students' SEL and development so that every student can reach their fullest academic potential? *(strategic objectives 3.1 and 3.2)*
- 4.2. What policies, programs, services, and practices associated with secondary CTE programs are effective in promoting student success in secondary education, postsecondary education, and the workforce, including that of underserved students? *(strategic objective 4.4)*
- 4.3. What policies, programs, services, and practices support the design of learning environments and educational experiences that are effective in reducing gaps in student opportunity and achievement, including those that are responsive to the assets and needs of underserved students? *(strategic objectives 3.1 and 3.2; see also PLQ 1.4, which addresses this question within the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic)*

- 4.4. What policies, programs, services, and practices best support the learning and development needs of multilingual learners, including Native language acquisition? *(strategic objective 3.3)*

## Short-Term Activities

IES' research centers have a long history of supporting rigorous evidence building related to policies, programs, services, and practices that support SEL and development. NCER and NCSER have made more than 240 research awards in their [Social and Behavioral Context for Academic Learning](#) and [Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Competence](#) grant programs. Building on this program of research, the National Center for Rural School Mental Health has created an [Early Identification System \(EIS\) intervention hub](#) that matches prevention strategies and interventions for students in elementary, middle, and high schools. In FY 2023 and FY 2024, the project team will test the efficacy of the fully developed EIS model. While the hub and model are being tested in rural areas, the intervention strategies included in the hub are likely valuable for educators in multiple settings. IES has also invested in developing reliable and valid measures of SEL. An example includes [SELweb](#), which directly assesses kindergarten through grade 6 students' understanding of others' emotions and perspectives, their social problem-solving skills, and their self-control. A new IES project will extend and validate the [use of SELweb with middle schoolers](#). Grants like these and the others supported by IES research centers provide actionable evidence relevant to PLQ 4.1.

NCER is also actively investing in supporting students' career development, including through rigorous research on CTE programs and program evaluations of relevant federal policies (PLQ 4.2). The [Career & Technical Education Research Network](#), jointly funded by NCER and the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), is conducting and sharing information about the impact of CTE on student success in secondary education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. Teams are already generating evidence that meets What Works Clearinghouse standards and indicates positive impacts of participation in CTE. In addition, the network provides [training](#) for CTE practitioners and state agency staff. This training is designed to strengthen their capacity to access, understand, and use CTE data and research as well as conduct their own research, including causal research.

NCEE and OCTAE are collaborating to build evidence related to career preparation and success (PLQ 4.2) as part of NCEE's [National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education under Perkins V](#). This includes the potential to conduct one or more impact studies of interventions designed to promote career development and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to succeed in 21st-century careers. The specific strategies to be tested will be finalized in FY 2022 in a collaboration between OCTAE and NCEE. Additionally, at least one impact study is under consideration of interventions that meet the specific career and academic needs of students participating in adult education programs. Evidence arising from these projects is expected in FY 2026 and beyond.

Ongoing work in NCEE supports both academic and SEL in ELs. In FY 2022, the Department will begin to release publications and products related to an ongoing evaluation of a strategy designed to improve the academic achievement of ELs (PLQs 4.3 and 4.4). This randomized control trial, NCEE's [Academic Language Impact Evaluation](#), contrasts student achievement



outcomes of third and fourth graders who participated in the program versus their peers who did not.

## Long-Term Activities

Elsewhere in the Department, programs like EIR have leveraged their grantmaking activities to build evidence related to SEL (PLQ 4.1) and academic learning (PLQ 4.3). For example, as part of OESE's FY 2020 EIR Program, the Department awarded \$46 million to support mid-phase grants that include an emphasis on SEL. As part of the [FY 2021 EIR competition](#), the Department sought evidence-building activities that promote SEL skills that prepare students to be informed, thoughtful, and productive individuals. Evidence arising from these projects is expected in FY 2026 and beyond.

Several notable IES activities will yield new evidence related to reducing gaps in student achievement between FY 2024 and FY 2026 (PLQ 4.3). In late FY 2024, the Department anticipates releasing evidence of the implementation and effectiveness of two programs focused supporting literacy among students in underserved populations as part of its [National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development and Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Programs](#). By FY 2026, NCEE anticipates releasing evidence from its anticipated Impact Study Using Technology to Accelerate Math Learning. This study will test the effectiveness of promising improvement strategies designed to accelerate student learning in Title I schools—such as those that use innovative education technologies to supplement mathematics instruction.

Between FY 2024 and FY 2026, NCEE will continue to build and share new evidence related to supporting ELs (PLQ 4.4). These activities build on NCEE's ongoing descriptive [Study of Educational Policies, Supports, and Practices for English Learners: Implementation of Title III and Social and Emotional Learning](#). During this time, NCEE anticipates sharing early learnings from its new Impact Study of Strategies to Improve English Learner Achievement, as described in the Department's forthcoming *FY 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan*.

Finally, when appropriate, the Department will consider the use of the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities in grant competitions relevant to this focus area. This includes the use of evidence in project design and grantee evidence building.

## Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Many evidence-building activities have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting impacts of the pandemic on states, schools, and districts. Studies that rely on student achievement data to measure interventions' efficacy have been particularly affected due to changes in state testing plans. However, a wide swath of research that depends on the collection of data—including data on social and emotional outcomes—from students and educators has been placed at risk. As a result, several studies have been delayed by one or more calendar years. As the nation's schools move toward reopening and recovery, student, educator, and other critical data should become increasingly available and allow work to resume.

# Focus Area 5:

**Increase postsecondary value by focusing on equity-conscious strategies to address affordability, completion, post-enrollment success, and support for inclusive institutions.**

## Alignment to Agency Strategy

<b>Strategic Objective 1.4:</b>	Promote greater access and supports for youth and adults to engage in learning, succeed in postsecondary education, and increase their employability in high-demand occupations.
<b>Strategic Objective 4.1:</b>	Support educational institutions and state systems in efforts to raise academic quality and college completion for all students, especially for underserved students, such as first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students with disabilities.
<b>Strategic Objective 4.3:</b>	Increase equitable access to secondary and postsecondary programs that have clear on-ramps to both high-quality jobs and additional high-quality postsecondary educational opportunities.
<b>Strategic Objective 4.4:</b>	Improve the alignment across secondary, postsecondary, and career and technical education programs, including through transparent and effective transition processes, inclusive pathways, and clear credentialing requirements.
<b>APG 3:</b>	Reduce disparities in attainment of high-quality degrees and credentials.

## Background

Earning a postsecondary credential, on average, benefits both students and society. Decades of research (e.g., [\*Learn more, earn more: Education leads to higher wages, lower unemployment\*](#) and [\*It's Not Just the Money: The Benefits of College Education to Individuals and to Society\*](#)) have documented that earning a college degree is associated with a meaningful wage premium when compared to a high school diploma, less frequent use of public benefits, and increased rates of civic participation. Although many barriers can hinder students' abilities to access postsecondary education, the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA) (Pub. L. 89-329) sought to remove one in particular: poverty. HEA's Title IV section on student assistance established the basic framework of today's financial aid system, comprising federal grants and loans as well as campus-based aid programs. Reauthorizations of HEA and related legislation have also created a set of programs meant to support students' successful transition to and completion of a postsecondary credential (e.g., TRIO programs). In addition, to help understand the use of Title IV funds, HEA requires conduct of a survey of students about how they are financing their postsecondary education and problems they may be facing in doing so. NCES conducts the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) at least every four years to address this requirement.

In the more than 50 years since HEA's passage, at least some of its promise has been realized: the percentage of adults ages 25 to 29 who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher has, for example, more than tripled. Also, information from NPSAS shows the use of Pell Grants

authorized under Title IV have become more pervasive over time and across different types of students, supporting access to postsecondary education for millions of people. However, significant concerns about students' access to and success in postsecondary education remain. By [2016](#), only 7 percent of high-income students who were in grade 9 in 2009 had never enrolled in some form of postsecondary education compared to 44 percent of their lowest-income peers. Once admitted, graduation is far from guaranteed. Fewer than two out of three (63 percent) of all beginning students who entered a four-year college in [2013](#) planning to earn a bachelor's degree had done so within six years, and up to 41 percent of all beginning students who entered a two-year college in [2016](#) were no longer enrolled after three years with no education credential to show for their attendance. In addition, the amount borrowed for postsecondary students who completed or expected to complete their postsecondary degree programs [increased from the mid-1990s to 2015–2016](#), illustrating that postsecondary degrees are increasingly accompanied with increased student loan debt.

## Priority Learning Questions

The Department proposes to prioritize a series of PLQs related to this focus area, which are in alignment with strategic objectives 1.4, 4.1, 4.3, and 4.4, and APG 3. These PLQs are:

- 5.1. How can equitable readiness for and access to postsecondary education best be improved for underserved students, including through federal college access programs? (*strategic objective 4.3 and APG 3*)
- 5.2. What policies, programs, services, and practices support engaging adult learners in postsecondary education that can increase their employability in high-demand and high-wage careers? (*strategic objective 1.4*)
- 5.3. What policies, programs, services, and practices support students' seamless and cost-effective transition both between secondary and postsecondary education and training as well as between postsecondary institutions? (*strategic objective 4.4*)
- 5.4. What resources, supports, and services do students, including those at the greatest disadvantage, receive to support their successful completion of a postsecondary credential? Additionally, which policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in achieving that goal? (*strategic objective 4.1; see also focus area 6 for the role of federal financial aid programs in the success of postsecondary students*)
- 5.5. What resources, supports, and services do postsecondary institutions—including Minority-Serving Institutions, Tribal colleges or universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and institutions that are under-resourced—receive to enable them to achieve their academic mission? Additionally, which policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in achieving that goal? (*strategic objective 4.1*)

## Short-Term Activities

The Department is currently addressing PLQ 5.1 by building evidence in two college access programs. Most immediately, NCEE anticipates releasing the results of its [Text Ed: A Study of Text Messaging to Improve College Enrollment Rates Among Disadvantaged Adults](#) impact study in early FY 2023. Deployed within the Department's Educational Opportunity Centers Program, this randomized control trial explores the extent to which texting is effective in

encouraging disadvantaged adults to file a *Free Application for Federal Student Aid*® (FAFSA®) filing and enroll in postsecondary institutions. A second study, the results of which are expected to be released in late FY 2023, focuses on the Department’s Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). Uniquely, GEAR UP provides scholarships in support of college access. More information on grantees’ use of the scholarship component, including both challenges and successes associated with its administration, has the potential to improve outcomes associated with the program.

NCER’s work bridges PLQs 5.1, 5.3, and 5.4. It supports the [Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness](#), which has been focused on understanding the national landscape of developmental education as well as research on mathematics pathways, multiple measures placement, summer bridge programs, and computerized mathematics remediation. Within the center, NCER is currently supporting a long-term follow-up study of students who participated in the Dana Center Math Pathways project while enrolled in developmental education on a host of postsecondary outcomes, including year-to-year persistence, credit attainment, completion of a degree or certificate, and transfer to a four-year institution. NCER’s [College Completion Network](#) is refining and evaluating interventions for increasing the number of students who earn degrees in open- and broad-access institutions. The network’s lead will be preparing a synthesis of findings from NCER-funded projects focusing on college completion that can support the Department’s understanding of what policies, programs, services, and practices best support the successful completion of a postsecondary credential. The network’s website includes a set of [resources](#) with information about individual projects.

## Long-Term Activities

In the President’s [FY 2022 Budget Request](#), the Department proposed a substantial new investment in its Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education Program to support evidence-based innovations designed to improve student success (PLQ 5.4). Importantly, this new grant program is proposed to follow the tiered evidence approach used elsewhere in the Department, including its EIR Program. This program—if implemented as hoped—has the potential to build rigorous evidence about “what works” to support students’ completion of a postsecondary credential and to scale effective practices. The Department is currently evaluating evidence-building approaches that would be most relevant to PLQ 5.5, which focuses on institutional support programs authorized under Title III and Title V of HEA.

Building evidence for PLQ 5.2, NCEE’s [Assessing Evidence of Effectiveness in Adult Education: Study of Career Navigator Training](#) leverages prior work that cataloged potentially effective practices in adult education. This randomized control trial seeks to understand the potential of career navigators to improve adult education outcomes. Specifically, it asks whether offering robust training to career navigators can improve adult learners’ college enrollment, credential attainment rates, employment rates, and earnings.

Newly funded research investments at NCER are explicitly addressing links between postsecondary education and employability in high-demand careers. For example, the Department anticipates that the following three projects will have findings of specific relevance to PLQ 5.2: [Postsecondary and Labor Market Effects of Career and Technical Education in Baltimore City Public Schools](#); [Sub-baccalaureate Career and Technical Education: A Study of](#)

[Institutional Practices, Labor Market Demand, and Student Outcomes in Florida; and Evaluating the Longer Term Impact of Early College High Schools on Workforce and Life Outcomes.](#)

In addition, one newly funded project will directly inform PLQ 5.3. The [Evaluation of the Texas House Bill 3 Financial Aid Application Requirement for High School Graduation](#) project will provide practical information regarding implementation of a statewide financial aid graduation requirement, how implementation of the policy varies across schools and districts, the means through which the policy is supported by the state education system, and how implementation of the policy is related to students' high school and postsecondary outcomes.

NCSER has recently begun to fund research in postsecondary education for students with disabilities, including through its Transition to Postsecondary Education, Career, and/or Independent Living Program. When complete, research in this area is intended to result in evidence to support access to, persistence in, progress through, and completion of postsecondary education or evidence to support learning, achievement, and higher order thinking in postsecondary courses.

Finally, when appropriate, the Department will consider the use of the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities in grant competitions relevant to this focus area. This includes the use of evidence in project design and grantee evidence building.

## **Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions**

The Department's evidence-building work in higher education stands to benefit should Congress adopt the President's FY 2022 Budget Request to, through appropriations language, create a pooled evaluation authority for programs authorized by HEA. This authority would allow the Department to conduct more, and more rigorous, evaluation of programs designed to improve college opportunity for students traditionally underserved by education systems.

In the meantime, the Department is considering how to best build evidence related to PLQs 5.1 and 5.6 in the face of two challenges. First, the Department has identified data quality concerns related to performance reporting within some TRIO Programs. Better understanding the extent of those concerns is needed before the best solution (or solutions) can be identified. Second, some statutory constraints limit the Department's capacity to build evidence related to TRIO. Specifically, grantees cannot be required to induce oversubscription or to deny service to any eligible student. As a result, program evaluations that rely upon randomization or delayed implementation are limited. In their place, the Department seeks to test effective practices that can be rigorously evaluated with the help of TRIO grantees (i.e., grantees are randomly assigned to implement, or not, a proposed access or success intervention).

# Focus Area 6:

Effectively manage federal student aid programs.

## Alignment to Agency Strategy

APG 2:

Effectively manage federal student loans.

## Background

[Research](#) has documented the economic and noneconomic benefits associated with earning postsecondary certificates and degrees. Title IV of HEA (Pub. L. 89-329) established the fundamental components of today's federal student aid programs, including need-based grants and loans. Subsequent HEA reauthorizations have expanded the number and types of student aid programs, who can benefit from those programs and by how much, and how students and parents who borrow for postsecondary education repay their loans. As of the end of FY 2020, more than [43 million borrowers](#) were responsible for more than \$1.56 trillion in federal student loan debt, and about [7.5 million borrowers](#) whose loans are in the federally managed portfolio were in default.

Today, questions concerning virtually every aspect of federal student aid programs abound. Most are concentrated in five areas: (1) who benefits from student aid programs; (2) how the Department can support access to programs among those who stand to benefit the most; (3) to what extent student aid programs make earning a postsecondary credential affordable; (4) how the Department can ensure that students and parents who borrow for postsecondary education successfully manage their loans; and (5) how the Department works with institutions and vendors, such as student loan servicers, to effectively administer federal student aid programs. For many observers, including the Department, the latter two questions are particularly critical.

As part of its own Strategic Plan, the Department's Federal Student Aid (FSA) has [committed to](#) "provid[ing] world-class customer experience to the students, parents, and borrowers we serve," acknowledging the critical role of third-party servicers in the success of the Department's student loan programs and the importance of ensuring servicer performance.

## Priority Learning Questions

The Department proposes to prioritize a series of PLQs related to this focus area, which are in alignment with APGs 2 and 3. These PLQs are:

- 6.1. What policies, programs, and practices are effective in informing students and families about, and supporting their access to, federal student aid programs, and which are effective in increasing students' enrollment in, persistence in, and completion of postsecondary programs? (APG 3)



- 6.2. How does awareness of, access to, and use of need-based grants and other forms of federal student aid affect students' enrollment, retention, completion, and indebtedness? (*APG 3*)
- 6.3. What policies, programs, services, and practices are associated with improving students' and borrowers' experiences and academic and financial outcomes when they engage with FSA and its processes (e.g., income verification) and partners (e.g., loan servicers)? (*APGs 2 and 3*)
- 6.4. What policies, programs, services, and practices associated with student loan administration and effective servicing and servicer oversight effectively improve borrower academic and post-completion outcomes, reduce delinquency and default, and/or improve borrowers' satisfaction with the loan repayment experience? (*APG 2*)
- 6.5. What are the characteristics of borrowers who struggle to repay their loans and the institutions they attend, and what are notable features of their repayment experience—including the plans they select and the features of those plans—and their repayment trajectories? How can repayment trajectories and adverse outcomes most accurately be predicted? (*APG 2*)
- 6.6. How targeted are current federal student aid programs to the students and purposes they are meant to serve, and how would changes to current needs analysis methods and other aspects of the grant and loan programs alter the incidence of student aid? (*APG 3*)

## Short-Term and Long-Term Activities

The Department is actively exploring how to prioritize evidence building within this focus area. Evidence building is already underway related to PLQ 6.4, including work inspired by the Department's use of its [Experimental Sites Initiatives](#) authority. Examples include an extension of NCEE's [Evaluation of the Pell Grant Experiments Under the Experimental Sites Initiative](#) to better understand the wage outcomes of short-term occupational training; [Evaluations of Federal Financial Aid Information and Delivery Strategies: An Experiment Requiring Additional Loan Counseling for Student Borrowers](#), designed to understand how to better help borrowers manage their debt; and [An Experiment in the Federal Work Study Program to Encourage Student Jobs in the Private Sector](#), which seeks to understand how flexibilities in the use of federal work-study funds affect students' work experiences and academic outcomes.

Further, the Department supports several NCES longitudinal studies of high school and postsecondary students that have been used to study factors associated with deciding to enroll in postsecondary programs and factors associated with successful completion of those programs. The most recent high school study was initiated in 2009 (the [High School Longitudinal Study of 2009](#)). While funding and staffing limits have prohibited recent follow-up collections, information is available about these high school students through 2016, including information about their dual enrollment during high school, their nondegree postsecondary education enrollment and completion, and factors related to accessing and completing postsecondary education more generally. A new high school cohort is about to start. The Department also supports a longitudinal study of beginning postsecondary students (the [Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study](#)) that provides information about challenges students face staying enrolled and completing their programs and how they manage their student loan debt.

## Anticipated Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Evidence building related to federal student aid programs has historically been complicated by a variety of factors. In some instances, the perception that benefits of rigorous evaluation are outweighed by the costs (e.g., burden on institutions or Department staff) has prevented evidence building. In others, evidence building has been slowed due to a lack of financial resources to support contract research or of federal staff resources to conduct research on their own or oversee contractors when available.

Notably, the recent passage of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022* has begun to address some of the financial barriers to evidence-building in this area. Section 312 of the general provisions associated with the Department's FY 2022 appropriation allows the Secretary to reserve up to 0.5 percent of funds authorized for many programs authorized by HEA to "carry out rigorous and independent evaluations and to collect and analyze outcome data for any program authorized by the HEA." Should this authority be continued in the future, it would represent a significant step in more consistently generating high quality evidence related to federal student aid programs.

# Appendix C. FY 2022–FY 2026 Capacity Assessment

## Introduction

Section 101 of the [\*Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018\*](#) (i.e., the Evidence Act) requires agency Evaluation Officers to “continually assess the coverage, quality, methods, consistency, effectiveness, independence, and balance of the portfolio of evaluations, policy research, and ongoing evaluation activities of the agency” and requires assessments be reported in each agency’s Strategic Plan. This fiscal year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Capacity Assessment includes six sections consistent with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance on implementing the Evidence Act. Section 1 begins with a list of activities and operations currently being evaluated and analyzed by the Department. In the five sections that follow it, the Department provides a brief assessment of the extent to which those activities and operations:

- Meet the needs of the Department’s operating components (section 2).
- Meet the Department’s learning, management, and accountability needs (section 3).
- Use appropriate analytic methods (section 4).
- Are supported by agency capacity for effective planning, execution, and dissemination (section 5).
- Are supported by agency capacity for effective use of evaluation evidence and data for analysis (section 6).

Readers should keep in mind that this document reflects the agency Evaluation Officer’s assessment of the Department’s evidence building and use capacity at the time it was written. Importantly, capacity is not fixed; it is the Department’s goal to consistently increase its capacity to build and use evidence in service of meeting its mission.

## Section 1: List of Activities and Operations Currently Being Evaluated and Analyzed

<b>Relevant Law(s):</b>	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(A) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
<b>Relevant Statutory Language:</b>	“...a list of the activities and operations of the agency that are currently being evaluated and analyzed....”

The Department conducts a wide range of analytic and evaluative activities every year. Most commonly, this involves individual offices reviewing program performance data for improvement purposes. Analyses of program performance data are also included in submissions to OMB and Congress as part of the annual budget process. Given their number and ubiquity across government, the Department does not list routine program performance activities in this Capacity Assessment.

Instead, the Department focuses on two streams of work: (1) novel analytic activities conducted in service of developing reports to Congress or publicly facing data and data tools and (2) implementation, output, and outcomes evaluations of federal education programs. The following table is illustrative of the Department’s work but not exhaustive. As noted elsewhere in this Capacity Assessment, the Department does not have a comprehensive inventory of analytic activities underway at any given time. The following table lists the name of each activity along with the sponsoring office within the Department. Where possible, links are provided to explanatory narratives or prototypical analytic products developed as part of the evaluation or analysis activity.

### Illustrative List of Data, Analytic, and Evaluation Activities.

Department Component	Example Data, Data Tool, Analysis, or Evaluation Activity
FSA	<a href="#">Application Volume Reports</a> , including <i>Free Application for Federal Student Aid®</i> (FAFSA®) data by demographic characteristics, by postsecondary school and state of legal residents, and by high school and public school district
FSA	<a href="#">Default Rates</a> , including cohort default rates by school, lender, state, and institution type; cumulative default rates; and new direct loan default
FSA	<a href="#">Federal Student Loan Portfolio</a> , including portfolio by loan type, age, debt size, location, school type, loan status, repayment plan, and delinquency status
FSA	<a href="#">Loan Forgiveness Reports</a> , including forgiveness via Borrower Defense, Teacher Loan Forgiveness, Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), and Closed School Discharge
FSA	<a href="#">Title IV Program Volume Reports</a> , including loans, grants, and campus-based aid programs
IES	<a href="#">Condition of Education</a> , including a new interactive web platform; the report includes key indicators on important developments and trends on all levels of education, labor force outcomes, and international comparisons, and these indicators are updated throughout the year as new data become available
IES	<a href="#">Digest of Education Statistics</a> , including new machine-readable tables covering the broad field of American education from prekindergarten through graduate school and drawing on data from many sources, both government and private, but especially on the results of surveys and activities carried out by the National Center for Education Statistics
IES	The <a href="#">National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Monthly School Survey</a> , including school information on learning modalities offered by schools (in-person, hybrid, or remote) and enrolled in by students, as well as other information on school policies associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2021

Department Component	Example Data, Data Tool, Analysis, or Evaluation Activity
IES	<a href="#">NAEP's The Nation's Report Card</a> , including new visualizations and analyses showing what students know and can do in various subjects across the nation, states, and in some urban districts
IES	<a href="#">EDFacts</a> , including prekindergarten through grade 12 data that supports planning, policymaking, and management/budget decision-making; centralizes data provided by state educational agencies; and collects data on districts and school demographics, program participation, and student performance
IES	<a href="#">The Common Core of Data</a> , including a comprehensive, annual, national database and tools with information on all public elementary schools and districts in the United States
IES	<a href="#">The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System</a> , including a database and tools on the condition of postsecondary education in the United States, with information on enrollment, admissions, program completions, graduation rates, student financial aid, tuition and fees, faculty, staff, library data, and finances from postsecondary institutions
IES	<a href="#">Data Tools</a> , including interactive online tools with data from national (e.g., NAEP) and international (e.g., Program for International Student Assessment and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) sources on student and adult performance and results from noncognitive surveys
IES	<a href="#">DataLab</a> , including an online table and regression tool with data from more than 30 federal education datasets and recently updated to provide easier use and faster results
IES	NAEP's <a href="#">Mapping State Proficiency Standards</a> studies, including analyses and tools that allow comparisons and tracking of proficiency criteria used on state assessments
IES	<a href="#">Evaluation of Title I Pilots That Provide Flexibility Under the Every Student Succeeds Act</a>
IES	<a href="#">Evaluation of Transition Supports for Youth with Disabilities</a>
IES	<a href="#">Evaluations of Federal Financial Aid Information and Delivery Strategies: An Experiment in the Federal Work Study Program to Encourage Student Jobs in the Private Sector</a>
IES	<a href="#">Evaluations of Federal Financial Aid Information and Delivery Strategies: An Experiment Requiring Additional Loan Counseling for Student Borrowers</a>
IES	<a href="#">Impact Evaluation of Teacher Residency Programs</a>
IES	<a href="#">Impact Evaluation of Training in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Reading in Early Elementary School</a>
IES	<a href="#">Impact Evaluation to Inform the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program</a>
IES	<a href="#">Impact Study of Feedback for Teachers Based on Classroom Videos</a>
IES	<a href="#">Impact Study of Magnet Schools</a>
IES	<a href="#">Implementation Evaluation of the Title III National Professional Development Program</a>
IES	<a href="#">Implementation of Key Federal Policies in the Wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic</a>
IES	<a href="#">Implementation of Title I/II-A Program Initiatives</a>
IES	<a href="#">National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education under Perkins V</a>
IES	<a href="#">National Evaluation of the 2019 Comprehensive Centers Program Grantees</a>
IES	<a href="#">National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development and Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Programs</a>
IES	<a href="#">National Implementation Study of Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV, Part A)</a>
IES	<a href="#">National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012</a>
IES	<a href="#">National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act</a>
IES	<a href="#">Study of Charter School Admission Practices and Barriers to Growth</a>
IES	<a href="#">Study of Data Disaggregation Initiative</a>
IES	<a href="#">Study of District and School Uses of Federal Education Funds</a>
IES	<a href="#">Study of Educational Policies, Supports and Practices for English Learners: Implementation of Title III and Social and Emotional Learning</a>
IES	<a href="#">Study of School Improvement Plans and Their Implementation</a>
IES	<a href="#">Study of Title II, Part A Use of Funds</a>
IES	<a href="#">Text Ed: A Study of Text Messaging to Improve College Enrollment Rates Among Disadvantaged Adults</a>
IES	<a href="#">The Effects of a Systematic Approach to Improving Quality in Afterschool Programs: An Impact Evaluation to Inform the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program</a>

Department Component	Example Data, Data Tool, Analysis, or Evaluation Activity
IES	<a href="#"><i>The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act State and Local Implementation Study 2019</i></a>
OCR	<a href="#"><i>Civil Rights Data Collection</i></a>
OCTAE	<i>Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program</i>
OESE	<i>Analysis for the Annual Report of Children in Institutions for Neglected or Delinquent Children, Adult Correctional Institutions, and Community Day Programs for Neglected and Delinquent Children</i>
OESE	Analysis of the National Survey of Charter School Facilities
OESE	Analysis of Title II, Part A Use of Funds Survey
OESE	Study of State Policies to Prohibit Aiding and Abetting Sexual Misconduct in Schools
OPE	Analysis of Title II Teacher Quality Accountability Data
OPEPD	Study of State Implementation of the Unsafe School Choice Option
OPEPD/ OCDO	<a href="#"><i>Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Public Transparency Portal</i></a> with COVID-19 pandemic relief data related to the <i>Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act</i> ; the <i>Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021</i> ; and the <i>American Rescue Plan Act of 2021</i>
OPEPD/ OCDO	<a href="#"><i>College Scorecard</i></a> , including information on institution-of-higher-education (IHE)-level data on student characteristics, debt, and outcomes, including repayment rates, default rates, and earnings information obtained from the Internal Revenue Service
OPEPD/ OCDO	<a href="#"><i>Open Data Platform</i></a> serving as a single, searchable inventory of the Department's data assets and associated metadata
OPEPD/ OCDO	Data Maturity Assessment, an annual assessment of each principal operating component within the Department that measures maturity across 18 data-related process areas
OPEPD/ OCDO	Data and Evidence Use Survey, conducted in coordination with IES' National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, is a Department-wide annual assessment of staff ability to use data and evidence
OPEPD/ OCDO	ESF Annual Performance Reports, include critical annual performance reporting for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools, and equivalent Outlying Area funds
OSERS/ OSEP	<a href="#"><i>Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</i></a>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Evaluation and Analysis of Case Service Reports (RSA-911)</i>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Evaluation and Analysis of Client Assistance Program Performance Reports (RSA-227)</i>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Evaluation and Analysis of Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights Program Performance Reports (RSA-509)</i>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Annual Report to Congress on Federal Activities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended</i>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Evaluation and Analysis of WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Reports for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (ETA-9169)</i>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Evaluation and Analysis of Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind Performance Reports (RSA-7-OB)</i>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Evaluation and Analysis of American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Performance Reports (RSA-AIVRS)</i>
OSERS/ RSA	<i>Evaluation and Analysis of Randolph-Sheppard Performance Reports (RSA-15)</i>

#### Acronyms and Definitions:

FSA = Federal Student Aid; IES = Institute of Education Science; OCR = Office for Civil Rights; OCTAE = Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education; OESE = Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; OPE = Office of Postsecondary Education; OPEPD = Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development; OCDO = Office of the Chief Data Officer; OSERS = Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; OSEP = Office of Special Education Programs; RSA = Rehabilitation Services Administration; ETA = Employment and Training Administration; and AIVRS = American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services.



## Section 2: Extent to Which Efforts Support the Needs of Various Divisions

Relevant Law(s):	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(B) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
Relevant Statutory Language:	“... the extent to which the evaluations, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency support the needs of various divisions within the agency....”

For the purpose of this Capacity Assessment, the Department operationalizes this requirement to mean “the extent to which the Department’s focal areas in its FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda are met by current or planned foundational fact finding, policy research, performance measurement, or program evaluation.” Each of those areas is addressed here. The full Learning Agenda can be found in Appendix B.

### Focus Area 1: Address the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students, Educators, and Faculty

As noted in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department has a range of priority learning questions (PLQs) related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These include questions related to how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected student achievement and the operations of schools, districts, states, and institutions of higher education (IHEs). Perhaps more importantly, they also include questions that seek to identify the policies, programs, services, and practices that are effective in supporting a robust recovery and the transformation of the nation’s education system to serve all students more equitably, particularly those who have been underserved.

The Department is actively building evidence in both domains; however, the urgency of the recovery effort, the complexity of the recovery-related questions, and the time required to conduct rigorous efficacy research suggest that even its best efforts may, to some, seem to fall short of meeting agency needs.

As described in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, evidence about the former set of questions is increasingly available either through the work of formative assessment providers or data collection efforts undertaken by the Department (e.g., [the National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) Monthly School Survey](#); releases of preliminary Common Core of Data (CCD), National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and [National Teacher and Principal Survey](#) (NTPS) 2021 data related to the COVID-19 pandemic; data from the School Pulse Panel Survey and the NAEP 2021 School and Teacher Questionnaire; the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance’s (NCEE’s) forthcoming [Implementation of Key Federal Education Policies in the Wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic](#) and [Study of District and School Uses of Federal Education Funds](#); and the Office of the Chief Data Officer’s (OCDO’s) [Education Stabilization Fund \(ESF\) Public Transparency Portal](#)). The portal serves as a preliminary window on how educational organizations are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows how COVID-19 pandemic relief funds were allocated to state educational agencies (SEAs), state governor’s offices, and IHEs and how the allocated funds are being used. Data on grant expenditures lag considerably, however, so evidence based on that data will take more time to be reliable and actionable.

However, evidence on the latter questions—broadly, recovery-focused efficacy research—is comparatively scarce. In the recovery’s early phase, the Department’s immediate focus was the curation and broad diffusion of existing research to schools, states, districts, and IHEs (e.g., *ED COVID-19 Handbook* [Volume 1](#), [Volume 2](#), and [Volume 3](#) as well as [Strategies for Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Full-Service Community Schools & Related Strategies](#)). Shortly thereafter, key components of the Department turned more squarely toward evidence building, most notably the Institute of Education Sciences’ (IES’) National Center for Education Research (NCER) and National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). IES currently has plans to invest up to \$100 million in research and development activities focused on the design, testing, and dissemination of practices that accelerate learning. Importantly, however, this work will take time to unfold; findings from the bulk of this research are expected in FY 2026 and beyond.

## **Focus Area 2: Promote Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources, Opportunities, and Inclusive Environments**

As described in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department seeks to build evidence in two broad domains related to equity. First, the Department seeks to better understand the extent to which the nation’s students experience inequities in the access to or outcomes of educational programs and services the Department supports. Second, the Department seeks to identify which policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in remedying inequitable access to resources and opportunities to learn and how to best ensure that all students experience education environments that are safe, are free from discrimination, and promote learning and development.

The Department is actively building evidence about the state of equity in the nation’s education system and is placing increasing focus on equitable data activities. Even as the Department continues to invest in research, development, and dissemination activities related to safe and supportive learning environments, more evidence on effective policies and practices related to equitable distribution of resources may be needed. As noted in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Office for Civil Rights’ Civil Rights Data Collection ([CRDC](#)) is a critical tool in understanding the state of equity in the nation’s kindergarten through grade 12 (i.e., K–12) schools. Other data and initiatives, including nearly all of the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES’) assessments (e.g., NAEP, Program for International Student Assessment, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, and other international assessments), surveys (e.g., NTPS and the many longitudinal studies), and administrative data collections (e.g., *EDFacts*, [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#), the CCD Education Finance Center, the Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates Program, the Ed Tech Equity Initiative); the Department’s, [College Scorecard](#) and [Open Data Platform](#); and information made available at Federal Student Aid’s (FSA’s) [Data Center](#), support useful analysis of equity within the nation’s primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Finally, consistent with the goals of [Executive Order 13985](#), the Department anticipates that an increasing number of existing data collections—and most, if not all, new ones—will lend themselves to useful equity-focused analysis. Annual performance reports for the ESF grants, for example, asks grantees to report things such as how they supported certain learning recovery for subpopulations disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and for eligibility and participation

student counts in underserved subgroups. Recognizing the grantees have not previously tracked demographic information to the level of detail requested, however, the more detailed data are optional on initial reports, with notice provided that it will be required in future reporting periods.

Although work of this type contributes to a more comprehensive description of equity in the nation's education system, it must be paired with high-quality evidence on how to create environments that are, in fact, more equitable, welcoming, and supportive for all students. The Department's efforts in this regard are many, ranging from high-quality technical assistance (e.g., [Equity Assistance Centers](#), the [National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments](#), the [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#)) to support for individual research efforts that have the potential to generalize broadly and shed light on classroom practice and the organization of education programs (e.g., [ECHO: Prosocial and Positive School Climate](#), [The Distributional Effects of Secondary Career and Technical Educational \(CTE\) Programs on Postsecondary Educational and Employment Outcomes: An Evaluation of Delaware's CTE Programs of Study](#), and [Shaping Teacher Quality and Student of Color Experience in Massachusetts: Alignment of Preparation and Licensure Systems with Teacher Effects on Student non-Test Outcomes](#)).

There has been comparatively less Department-sponsored research, however, on the equitable distribution of resources that make high-quality opportunities to learn more available to all students. Most research has focused on weighted student funding (WSF) approaches (e.g., [Districts' Use of Weighted Student Funding Systems to Increase School Autonomy and Equity: Findings From a National Study](#) and [How do Spending Patterns Change with Weighted Student Funding \(WSF\), and What's Happening to Equity and Achievement, Particularly for Poor and At-Risk Students?](#)). Other promising resource allocation strategies may be as, or more, effective than WSF in supporting the needs of all students, particularly those who are most underserved. As such, more work may be needed to explore strategies other than WSF if the Department hopes to accelerate progress toward its equity goals.

### **Focus Area 3: Support a Diverse and Talented Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning**

Consistent with priorities outlined in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department has identified three ways in which it expects to build evidence that can inform its work to support a diverse, well-trained, and well-prepared educator workforce. First, it seeks to ensure that educators are prepared to support the full range of students' social, emotional, mental health, academic, and career needs. Second, the Department seeks to ensure in-service educators have access to high-quality professional development and opportunities for career growth to ensure that well-qualified educators remain in the classroom. Third, the Department seeks to understand the extent to which the educator workforce, particularly those who are well-qualified in their specific field of instruction, reflect today's students and is equitably distributed among them.

The Department has a long-standing and well-developed portfolio of work on teacher professional development and recently began work on specific features of teacher preparation. Sample survey data on the teacher workforce are available, but more granular data may be required to meet some of the Department's goals. As is the case in other focal areas of the

Learning Agenda, evidence building surrounding educators and educator preparation takes place in multiple locations across the Department; this includes both the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education’s [Effective Educator Development \(EED\) Program](#) and IES. EED’s [Supporting Effective Educator Development Grant Program](#) focuses on building rigorous evidence on grantee activities that focus on either teacher and principal development through nontraditional preparation pathways and professional growth through both advanced education credentials and high-quality professional development. IES also makes substantial investments in evaluation, research, and statistics related to educators each year. Over the past decade, IES has sponsored nearly [two dozen evaluations](#) focused on teachers and leaders, including work presently underway to better understand the role of [teacher residency programs](#) in preparing new teachers, improving instruction via [feedback](#), and using [teacher leader models](#). In that same time, NCER has supported more than 100 field-initiated grants to its [Effective Instruction Program](#), including more than two dozen in the past five years alone. NCESER has funded about 35 grants through its Educators and School-Based Service Providers portfolio and 20 grants from a 2017 research competition focused solely on research on teachers and other instructional personnel.

NCES also collects survey data on the characteristics and experiences of the educator workforce, such as through the [Teaching and Learning International Survey](#) and NTPS. Other NCES data collections, such as the [NAEP Survey Questionnaires](#) and [High School Longitudinal Study of 2009](#), collect data on both teacher and student characteristics and experiences. Examples of how those data are used include a 2017 NCES study titled [Certification Status and Experience of U.S. Public School Teachers: Variation Across Student Subgroups](#), which analyzes the relationships between teacher characteristics/experiences and different student populations. To the extent the Department needs more detailed information about the alignment between educator and student populations, additional data would need to be collected to meet its goals. The ESF Annual Performance Reports, in part, support that need. Data on how COVID-19 pandemic relief funds were used to launch new full-service community schools and hire or retain positions in several categories (i.e., special educators, bilingual or English as a second language educators, school counselors, and nurses, among others) are collected at the local educational agency (LEA) level, which can be linked with demographic data from other Department studies to inform teacher alignment with student populations.

## **Focus Area 4: Meet Students’ Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs**

Promoting growth across a range of important learning and developmental outcomes, including social, emotional, academic, and career needs—particularly for students belonging to groups that have been underserved by the nation’s education system—is a priority in the Department’s FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda. Efficacy research on specific strategies is of particular importance.

This area is a particular strength for the Department. Over time, anticipated activities that span (and predate) the FY 2022–2026 period are likely to make substantial contributions to the evidence base. In addition to field-initiated research sponsored by IES, the Department has identified several opportunities to explicitly build evidence on effective strategies for supporting students’ academic-, social-, emotional-, and career-development needs. As noted in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, as part of its [FY 2021 Education Innovation and Research Program](#), the Department published a [Notice of Inviting Applications](#) that included an absolute

priority for mid-phase projects that “promote social and emotional learning skills that prepare students to be informed, thoughtful, and productive individuals.” The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), as part of the [National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education Under Perkins V](#), is collaborating with NCEE to design multiple efficacy trials of interventions explicitly designed to promote career development, including the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to succeed in high-demand careers. Other activities poised to support the Department’s evidence-building need include projects such as NCES’ Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Program, which collects data on children’s socio-emotional development from birth through elementary school, and NCEE’s [National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development and Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Programs](#) and the [Study of Educational Policies, Supports and Practices for English Learners: Implementation of Title III and Social and Emotional Learning](#). The ESF Annual Performance Reports also collect data on how the COVID-19 pandemic relief funds were used to support social, emotional, and other needs as well as specific fund usage supporting mental health for students and staff.

### **Focus Area 5: Increase Postsecondary Value by Focusing on Equity-Conscious Strategies to Address Affordability, Completion, Post-Enrollment Success, and Support for Inclusive Institutions**

The Department’s FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda includes PLQs focused on postsecondary, adult, and continuing education that fall in to two broad domains. First, the Department hopes to explore the policies, programs, practices, services, and practices that are associated with postsecondary access and success, with an emphasis on affordability and better meeting the needs of traditionally underserved students. Second, the Department seeks to better understand its institutional support programs, including those focused on Minority-Serving Institutions, Tribal colleges or universities, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Over time, the Department has used foundational fact finding and program evaluation to build evidence about college access, affordability, and completion. In terms of foundational fact finding, NCES collects data on the characteristics of students in postsecondary education, persistence and degree attainment, transition to employment, and school and work experiences through its NPSAS, Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. Research and evaluation activities, including those sponsored by IES and the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE), have sought to build evidence relevant to student access and success. Recent examples include IES’ work on enhanced college advising programs within Upward Bound (i.e., [Effectiveness of Promising Strategies in Federal College Access Programs: Study of Enhanced Advising to Improve College Fit in Upward Bound](#)), text-based supports for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) students (i.e., [Effectiveness of Promising Strategies in Federal College Access Programs: Study of College Transition Text Messaging in GEAR UP](#)), and efforts to improve enrollment for adult students traditionally underserved by higher education (i.e., [Text Ed: A Study of Text Messaging to Improve College Enrollment Rates Among Disadvantaged Adults](#)).

Additional work supporting this focus area is happening elsewhere within the Department. For example, OCDO’s [College Scorecard](#) provides IHE-level data on postsecondary student



characteristics, debt, and outcomes, including completion, repayment, default, and earnings, among others. OPE has used grant-based mechanisms—most notably the [First in the World](#) tiered evidence program—to develop and test innovative approaches to supporting postsecondary persistence and completion. Less research, however, has been conducted on policies and practices designed to transform postsecondary institutions themselves (e.g., articulation policies, advising reform, curricular redesign, and reforms in the assessment of student learning). To be sure, exceptions exist, most notably within the domain of developmental education reform (e.g., [The Implementation, Impact, and Cost-Effectiveness of Developmental Education Curricular Reform in California Community Colleges](#), [Exploring Co-Requisite Developmental Education Models](#), and [Changing Policy and Practice in Developmental Education: Assessing the Evidence and Engaging the Field](#)). However, additional evidence building that assesses the feasibility and efficacy of strategies that change systems within and between postsecondary institutions in service of student success may be needed to meet the Department’s Strategic Goals.

## **Focus Area 6: Effectively Manage Federal Student Aid Programs**

Finally, the Department’s FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda includes a series of PLQs related to evidence building in service of improving the design and delivery of its federal student aid programs. This includes work on improving the customer experience, better understanding how aid programs are associated with and can be used to bolster student academic and post-completion success, and supporting borrowers in successfully managing their student loan debt.

The Department needs to maintain (or strengthen) its capacity to conduct research and analysis critical to the operations of the federal student aid program while building capacity related to addressing its PLQs. Notwithstanding the PLQs set forth in the Department’s FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, FSA has wide-ranging operational questions and concerns—some stemming from the recent COVID-19 pandemic, others as a result of its own Strategic Goals and objectives as identified in its [Fiscal Year 2020 through 2024 Strategic Plan](#)—that must be appropriately resourced and addressed. Whereas many of those questions are consistent with the broad goals of the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the challenge facing the Department is how, to the extent possible, to build all the evidence that is a priority for internal stakeholders. Existing projects have demonstrated the value of strong collaborations between FSA and evidence-building partners. Examples include recently completed, planned, and ongoing evaluations of FSA experimental sites by NCEE (e.g., [Evaluation of the Pell Grant Experiments Under the Experimental Sites Initiative](#) and [Evaluations of Federal Financial Aid Information and Delivery Strategies: An Experiment in the Federal Work Study Program to Encourage Student Jobs in the Private Sector](#)); a historic collaboration between FSA and NCES in the production of the [NPSAS](#) and its longitudinal follow-ups; and work between FSA and OCDO on the [College Scorecard](#). However, the Department’s FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda envisions answering questions that will require new lines of research, new collaborations, and most likely, new resources. Meeting those challenges represents a significant opportunity for the Department to benefit the nation’s students, particularly those who have been underserved by postsecondary education. Building human, analytic, and resource capacity in this space must become a shared priority.



## Section 3: Extent to Which Efforts Are Balanced

<b>Relevant Law(s):</b>	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(C) and OMB Circular No. A-11 (2020) Section 290.13
<b>Relevant Statutory Language:</b>	“... the extent to which the evaluation, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency address an appropriate balance between needs related to organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency and private sector coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability...”

For the purposes of this Capacity Assessment, the Department operationalizes this requirement as the extent to which Department evidence-building activities support organizational learning; performance, program, and strategic management; and accountability for results on Agency Priority Goals (APGs).

The Department focuses its discussion on its APGs for three reasons. First, by definition, APGs reflect agency leadership’s top priorities and are meant to include only those areas in which significant progress and change are needed most. Second, given their time-bound nature (i.e., APGs are meant to be achievable within 24 months), APGs demand high-quality, current data to support senior leadership’s strategic management efforts. Finally, senior leaders are personally—and publicly via [performance.gov](https://performance.gov)—accountable for achieving APGs. Although not reflecting the totality of the Department’s evidence needs, APGs are, by definition, among the highest priority.

The Department has developed three APGs relevant to this Strategic Plan. The proposed APGs focus on (1) addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, educators, and faculty; (2) effectively managing federal student loans, including the repayment experience and outcomes of federal student loan borrowers; and (3) reducing the disparities in attainment of high-quality degrees and credentials. However, the extent to which the Department can successfully leverage evidence in support of organizational learning; performance, program, and strategic management; and accountability for results in these three areas will be a useful barometer in gauging its ability to balance three sometimes competing prerogatives across its wider portfolio.

Although the Department has already begun to take steps related to its proposed APGs, it is too early to assess whether its evidence-building and use activities will be put to their best use in achieving them. In the coming months, this assessment will be updated to reflect the Department’s assessment of progress in that area. Currently, however, the Department notes the following:

- Most of the outcome metrics identified for its APGs are available in existing Department data systems, although their timeliness varies. Most lag by one or more quarters, rather than being “near real time.” This may result in evidence that is suitable for accountability purposes and future organizational learning but not sufficient to support more immediate management decisions about program administration and/or performance and strategic decision-making.
- The Department has demonstrated the ability to rapidly augment its data collections to build new evidence when existing systems were not originally built to provide it. NCES

was able to leverage its existing NAEP School Survey to rapidly collect and report data about school reopening and learning modality, yielding actionable information for decision-makers that lagged by only a few weeks rather than multiple quarters or years. Similar work, done by OCDO, has given the public rapid and unprecedented insight into entities' use of federal recovery funds. Both demonstrate that the Department can—when conditions warrant, infrastructure is in place, and systems are sufficiently flexible—build evidence that decision-makers can use for management decisions. The questions facing the Department are how and when it should make the extraordinary ordinary and how those efforts will be prioritized and resourced.

- The Department has a structure for regular quarterly performance review that involves senior career and political leadership that could, at the discretion of the new Deputy Secretary, be used not only to drive internal accountability but also to support learning-focused conversations designed to support program performance.

As the agency finalizes metrics for monitoring its progress toward achieving its APGs, this Capacity Assessment will be updated to reflect the Department's progress in building and using evidence in a balanced fashion.

## Section 4: Extent to Which Methods are Appropriate

<b>Relevant Law(s):</b>	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(D)
<b>Relevant Statutory Language:</b>	“... the extent to which the agency uses methods and combinations of methods that are appropriate to agency divisions and corresponding research questions being addressed, including an appropriate combination of formative and summative evaluation research and analysis approaches.”

The Department employs a set of interrelated policies, standards, and guidelines to ensure that evidence builders use analytic methods appropriate to the questions they seek to answer. Generally, the Department’s aim is to use the most rigorous methods appropriate to a given question, subject to constraints, including the time horizon in which results are needed, return on investment, and the amenability of a question to rigorous research and evaluation.

### Program Evaluations

Consistent with [OMB M-20-12, Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices](#), the Department places considerable emphasis on methodological rigor in its program evaluations. (Specific practices are detailed in the Department’s [Evaluation Policy](#).) Those evaluations are of three types: (1) impact evaluations, which make causal claims about interventions’ effects on outcomes; (2) outcome evaluations, which make claims of association between interventions and outcomes; and (3) implementation evaluations, which make descriptive claims about program operations. Generally, IES and NCEE do not make a sharp distinction between formative evaluations (i.e., evaluations primarily oriented toward program improvement) and summative evaluations (i.e., evaluations primarily oriented toward determining impact). Every well-designed evaluation represents an opportunity to improve program performance and support organizational learning and, when conditions permit, make statements about the effect of a program on its individual beneficiaries and the larger education system.

At present, IES’ NCEE conducts all Department program evaluations. Only randomized control trials are used in NCEE impact evaluations. Outcome evaluations can employ a wider range of methods, including matching designs, difference-in-difference designs, comparative interrupted time-series designs, and regression discontinuity designs. Implementation evaluations use a wide range of descriptive quantitative methods, often complemented by qualitative findings (e.g., case studies).

### Statistical Collections

Consistent with [OMB M-15-03, Department Support of Implementation of Statistical Policy Directive 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units](#), the Department is committed to conducting objective, credible, and accurate statistical activities that can address its evidence needs and those of its stakeholders.

IES’ NCES is the Department’s principal statistical agency and is responsible for the bulk of its statistical collections. Specific practices NCES uses to ensure that its procedures and methods are appropriate to the questions official statistics seek to answer are detailed in its [Statistical](#)

[Standards](#). These standards cover all phases of a study's life cycle, including developing concepts and methods, planning and designing surveys, collecting data, editing and processing data, analyzing data and producing estimates or projections, establishing review procedures, and disseminating data. NCES' Statistical Standards are periodically revised to align to new methods, technologies, and federal guidance, all to ensure the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of NCES data collections, statistical analyses, and reporting.

The standards describe the steps NCES takes to protect individually identifiable information of its respondents, as required by law. This requirement includes protecting the information during the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of the data. NCES' [Statistical Standards and Data Confidentiality staff unit](#) has two major functions in the area of information protection. First, the unit directs the NCES Disclosure Review Board (DRB) comprised of members from each NCES division, representatives from the Statistical Standards and Data Confidentiality staff, and a member from each IES center. The NCES DRB works in coordination with the Department's central DRB and reviews disclosure risk analyses conducted by IES and NCES staff and contractors to ensure that data released do not disclose the identity of any individual respondent. The second major activity in this area is the Restricted-Use Data (RUD) Licensing Program. The licensing program provides external researchers with access to individually identifiable IES and NCES data covered under federal statutes and regulations by subjecting authorized researchers to the laws, regulations, and penalties that apply to use of confidential data held by IES. NCES recently partnered with the Coleridge Initiative to provide affordable, remote, and secure access to NCES RUD data sets. In 2020, NCES granted approximately 1,200 RUD licenses and had approximately 3,800 researchers using these licenses.

## **Policy and Other Analyses**

Charged with carrying out the responsibilities under 44 U.S.C. § 3520, OCDO is responsible for managing and improving the Department's ability to leverage data as a strategic asset. Housed within the Department's principal office responsible for policy development (i.e., the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (OPEPD)), OCDO's Division of Analytics and Infrastructure serves as the Department's internal consultants for policy analysis and data science. It provides analytical support to principal operating components (POCs), supporting the improvement of decision-making; optimization of programs for desired outcomes; and the generation of efficiencies to reduce burden, improper payments, and other risks. It does this through cutting-edge and emerging methods, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence for program optimization, predictive analytics, and the development of other analytical products.

Among other responsibilities, OCDO's Division of Governance and Strategy is responsible for evaluating data for value, risk, and quality, including agency policies related to the *Information Quality Act*. The Department's [Information Quality Guidelines](#) outline the ways in which it seeks to ensure the utility, objectivity, and integrity of information it disseminates to the public, including information stemming from research studies. Central to the Department's efforts to produce objective information is ensuring that the data-collection and -analysis methods used in its generation are appropriate to the information's eventual purpose. This includes research questions that are clearly stated and posed in an objective manner, well-designed and clearly described methods, and conclusions that are strongly supported by the data. Peer review is also required for Department research and evaluation activities.

## **Evaluation Officer's Commentary on Program Evaluations and Statistical Collections**

All NCEE evaluations and NCES statistical collections are subject to both internal and external peer review. This helps ensure that NCEE and NCES staff and contractors have effectively implemented the procedures and methods identified. The external review process is managed by the IES Standards and Review Office, which is headed by the institute's Deputy Director of Science and is independent from both NCEE and NCES. IES peer reviewers are nationally and internationally known experts in their fields and confirm that they have no conflict of interest with the study under review. Taken together, these processes offer reasonable confidence that the methods being used are appropriate to the questions they seek to address.

## **Evaluation Officer's Commentary on Other Analyses**

The Department does not systematically catalog the totality of “administrative and support tasks ... that are currently being evaluated and analyzed.” In principle, each of these efforts should be undertaken in a manner that comports with existing Information Quality Guidelines. However, without a complete roster of other analyses and information about how they are conducted, it is not possible to assess the extent to which those analyses, and any non-NCES data collections upon which they depend, are being conducted in a manner appropriate to the questions they seek to address. As a part of the Department's [Data Strategy](#) and response to the Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) Management Challenges, the Department plans to consider updates to its Information Quality Act Guidelines in FY 2022 and establish new processes that ensure data quality is fit for its purpose.

To mitigate the risks associated with data collection and analysis methods that may be misaligned to the questions they seek to address, the Department's Statistical Official (SO) proposed the development of agency-wide statistical standards development and training in FY 2021. Unfortunately, plans for this activity were put on hold as the agency pivoted to its COVID-19 pandemic response. This activity will be revisited in FY 2022 under the auspices of the Department's SO.

## Section 5: Extent to Which Evaluation and Research Capacity Is Present

<b>Relevant Law(s):</b>	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(E) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
<b>Relevant Statutory Language:</b>	“... the extent to which evaluation and research capacity is present within the agency to include personnel and agency processes for planning and implementing evaluation activities, disseminating best practices and findings, and incorporating employee views and feedback.”

### Personnel

#### *Evaluation*

IES’ NCEE currently conducts all Department program evaluations. Within NCEE, program evaluations are directly overseen by the center’s Associate Commissioner for Evaluation. Staffing within NCEE has remained stable. As of September 2021, the Evaluation Division employs 14 full-time employees (FTEs). NCEE evaluators include General Schedule (GS)-0110 economists and GS-1730 education research analysts. Most evaluators have the terminal degree in their field, such as Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), or Master of Public Policy (MPP) degrees.

Each staff member is assigned a specific topical area of responsibility (e.g., adult education) that aligns to the function of a specific Department program office (e.g., OCTAE’s Adult Education Branch). More NCEE staff members are assigned to prekindergarten through grade 12 and special education topics than to topics focused on postsecondary, adult, or career education. Currently, one staff member is responsible for the entirety of NCEE’s adult education portfolio, and two are responsible for its postsecondary portfolio, one of whom also serves as the Associate Commissioner for NCEE’s Evaluation Division.

#### *Statistical Collections*

NCES is also responsible for conducting and analyzing the Department’s statistical data collections as well as ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of its collections, in coordination with the Department’s Privacy Program. Within NCES, collections, analyses, reporting, and confidentiality are directly overseen by the center’s Commissioner.

Staffing within NCES has declined. As of November 2021, NCES employs 92 FTEs. This is down from 2020, when there were 106 FTEs. Many NCES staff are in the statistics (GS-1530) or mathematical statistics (GS-1529) series. Other staff include GS-1730 education research analysts, GS-0343 management and program analysts, and others. Most staff have the terminal degree in their field, such as the Ph.D., Ed.D., or MPP. Each staff member is typically assigned to a division focusing on a specific type of data collection (e.g., assessment, sample surveys, or administrative data) or on statistical standards and data confidentiality. NCES has well defined and proven processes to maintain its high standards, mitigate the risk of data disclosure, and ensure confidentiality. However, this work takes significantly longer than desired with the current level of staff—five FTE—even with the support of contractors. As NCES will not take on more risk with the data we protect as the demand increases with the Evidence Act, the alternatives are to either increase the FTE sufficient to manage the activities (e.g., the eight FTE



requested by NCES) or significantly lengthen the already long response times needed to protect data from risk.

### ***Data***

Charged with carrying out the responsibilities under 44 U.S.C. § 3520, OCDO is responsible for managing and improving the Department's ability to leverage data as a strategic asset. Beyond the team historically overseeing the Department's responsibilities under the *Paperwork Reduction Act*, OCDO has only two FTEs dedicated to supporting development and execution of OCDO and Department policies on life cycle data management, data resources, data protection, data quality, access, and dissemination, all key components of the Evidence Act.

Despite these limited resources, OCDO has been responsible for drafting the agency's first-ever Data Workforce Plan that maps solutions for identified gaps based on the Department's Data Competency Framework; serving as program managers for the Department's [Data Governance Board \(DGB\)](#), which serves as the agency-wide forum for identifying data challenges and strategic solutions; creating the Department's first [Data Strategy](#), which established a multiyear plan to improve the Department's ability to create and use data; administering for each POC its annual Data Maturity Assessment to prioritize resources and evaluate return of data investment; helping establish the agency's first Data Professional's Community of Practice to provide training opportunities to Department staff; and creating the agency's first Data Quality Playbook to provide program officers with actionable strategies to improve collections.

### ***Other Evidence-Building Partners***

Program offices are primarily responsible for the analysis of performance data and related policy analyses. They are supported by evidence-building partners including OPEPD's Grants Policy Office (GPO), OCDO, and the Department's Budget Service (BS). Specific staffing models vary widely within and across the Department's POCs.

## **Planning and Implementation**

The Department's capacity to plan evidence building and use activities extend beyond staff assigned to NCEE. Evidence is a team sport at the Department and includes staff from the Department's program offices, including OPEPD's GPO, OCDO, NCES, SO, BS, and the Office of the General Counsel (OGC).

Evidence-building activities are typically identified and designed via collaboration between individual programs and the appropriate Department evidence-building partners, including (1) OCDO, GPO, and BS for performance data and policy analysis; (2) NCEE and, as needed, BS, OGC, and OPEPD for program evaluations; and (3) NCES for statistical collections. Joint planning activities, piloted in FY 2021, yielded mixed results. Although evidence-building partners reported a greater understanding of each other's activities, many found the process overly burdensome. The Department continues to explore ways to seamlessly introduce opportunities for collaboration into the rhythm of the business so they are viewed as a natural extension of existing work rather than a new expectation.

The Department's challenges with planning and managing its own data for evidence building have been well-documented. Since 2008, the Department's OIG has annually identified data as

its own major management challenge. To help POCs prioritize their own data investments, OCDO administered the agency's first-ever annual data maturity assessment in 2020 and did so for each of the 15 POCs across the Department. Using standard industry measures, the Department found that nearly every POC had opportunities to improve POC-level processes—including those related to data quality and infrastructure—even though POCs generally prioritize, request, and manage their own budgetary resources supporting those processes. Although successes were noted across the Department, the inability to pool funds across programs generally creates, at best, siloed solutions in data infrastructure. Guided by the Department's [Data Strategy](#), in 2021 OCDO launched an effort to identify redundancies in data investments and create a target state agency-wide process for data investment planning that would promote modernization and efficiency.

Once planned, how evidence-building activities are ultimately implemented varies. As described elsewhere, NCES is the Department's designated principal statistical agency and is responsible for foundational fact finding undertaken for statistical purposes. NCEE's staff of professional evaluators design plans for rigorous implementation and outcome evaluations and then oversee their successful execution by third-party research firms. As noted, evidence building focused on the analysis of performance data, and the analysis of those and other data for policymaking, is typically the responsibility of program offices and OPEPD evidence-building partners. As discussed next, the human, financial, and data resources available to these partners to execute evidence-building plans also varies.

## **Dissemination**

### ***Program Evaluations***

Even prior to the establishment of the Department's [Evaluation Policy](#), NCEE's Standards and Practices document (now replaced in its entirety by the Evaluation Policy) placed an emphasis on transparency of evaluation findings. That is, all evaluations were posted to the NCEE website following approval by the IES Standards and Review Office and a two-week notification period afforded the Secretary, during which time program leaders were briefed on evaluation findings.

### ***Statistical Products***

The dissemination of NCES statistical products is guided by OMB Statistical Policy Directive #1 (*Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units*), OMB Statistical Policy Directive #4 (*Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies*), and NCES' Statistical Standards. NCES strives to ensure that, among other things, the dissemination of public data is timely, that notices of releases are publicly available and that the public is notified of schedule changes in the releases, all users have equitable access to the data, a variety of dissemination techniques are utilized, the public is notified about any changes to the released data, complete documentation of dissemination policies is provided to the public, there is outreach to the media, and that any public access to prerelease products remain embargoed and secure. NCES' statistical products are posted to the NCES website following their approval by NCES' Statistical Standards and Data Confidentiality unit, NCES' Commissioner, and IES' Director. Before products are publicly available, Department staff, including the Secretary, are briefed on the main findings.

Dissemination of evaluation findings and statistical products has typically taken three forms.

First, once posted to the IES website, IES sends “NewsFlashes” for all releases via its social media channels. This includes an email listserv, which has 11,000 subscribers to the NCEE Evaluation Reports topic; the [@IESResearch](#) Twitter account, which has 20,400 subscribers; [Facebook](#), which includes 2,000 followers; and [LinkedIn](#), which has 200 followers.

Second, IES engages in targeted dissemination to government partners who might benefit from research, evaluation, and statistical products and findings. This includes staff within the Department, including program staff, colleagues in mission-support offices (e.g., OGC, BS, and OPEPD), and other colleagues in IES; staff at OMB or the Government Accountability Office (GAO); and staff to authorizing and appropriating committees of Congress.

Third, in some instances, IES engages in targeted dissemination to communities of education practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Examples include a presentation to national advocacy associations, the design and dissemination of practitioner-facing materials arising from an evaluation (e.g., manuals that describe how to implement a tested intervention), and presentations at academic conferences or articles in professional journals.

Notably, under the leadership of the IES Director, IES has sought to improve the usability of content going into its existing dissemination channels. Upon the Director’s arrival in spring 2018, he sought to move IES toward shorter, approachable formats. As a result, most new IES products come in three formats: a 15-page primary report with supporting appendices, a 4-page “leave behind” for stakeholders and informed audiences that offers high-level detail of the study’s purpose and findings, and a 1-page “snapshot” for senior leaders and media that focuses on key takeaways.

## **Employee and Stakeholder Feedback**

NCEE staff engage program office staff in the initial conceptualization of evaluation studies in an effort to ensure they are relevant and timely. Program office staff typically are also involved in the design and execution of a study and its resulting products by virtue of their participation in Technical Working Group meetings, which are held at key points in the study life cycle. Technical Working Groups also engage stakeholders outside the Department, including other government partners (e.g., OMB and GAO), university-based researchers, experts at social research consultancies, educators, and advocates.

NCES regularly engages with its key stakeholders, including SEAs, LEAs, schools, IHEs, educators, other respondents, policymakers, researchers, subject matter experts, the public, and the other countries with whom the United States participates in international studies. NCES convenes standing committees of state representatives and subject matter experts; collaborates with SEA and LEA staff dedicated to the NAEP program; coordinates with national associations representing states, large city schools, educators, and other stakeholders; and convenes topic-specific panels of experts to provide the center with guidance in the design, administration, analysis, and reporting of its studies.

## Evaluation Officer's Commentary on the Presence of Evaluation Capacity

The Department is widely held across the federal government to be a leader in rigorous program evaluation, statistical activities, and evidence building, and that reputation is well-deserved. The Department has a strong, centralized evaluation service that, compared to some other agencies, is well-staffed with highly trained evaluation professionals. Its evaluation function is also autonomous and committed to transparency, objectivity, and privacy. The Department's statistical agency, NCES, is also renowned nationally. However, its staffing is low relative to other federal statistical agencies. NCES is the third largest of the principal federal statistical agencies in terms of program dollars but one of the smallest in terms of full-time staff. To maintain its national leadership, the Department may wish to consider several opportunities for improvement in FY 2022 and beyond.

### Personnel

Most NCEE program evaluation staff are currently tasked with evaluating the Department's K–12 programs; only three have direct responsibility for evaluating postsecondary or adult education programs. Because the amount of evidence needed to support K–12-focused programs has continued to grow, reassignment of staff from K–12 programs to postsecondary programs has been avoided. The resulting disparity diminishes NCEE's capacity to independently evaluate *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA) Title IV federal student aid programs and other critical programs that support postsecondary students and institutions. Staffing constraints also limits the extent to which NCEE can contribute to a fulsome implementation of the Evidence Act. All Evidence Act requirements have been added to the duties of existing staff rather than hiring new staff to support Evidence Act implementation.

Similarly, without additional staff, it has been—and will continue to be—challenging for NCES to implement the Evidence Act's key requirements found in Title III. Absent new hiring, NCES will need to reduce key statistical activities and possibly eliminate whole data-collection programs to fulfill those requirements. Since NCES plays a central role in developing foundational fact finding with its data collections for developing evidence required in the Evidence Act, it is important that NCES not move staff from those data-collection efforts to those activities fulfilling the requirements found in Title III. To help ensure that the SO fulfills the relevant requirements in the Evidence Act while allowing NCES to perform its regular statistical activities and data collections, NCES has proposed the hiring of eight new full-time staff for FY 2022. The proposed new staff will assist the SO and NCES in developing greater capacity to fulfill the requirements in Title III of the Evidence Act, such as developing and overseeing data quality and confidentiality standards, sharing and protecting *Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act* data sets, and implementing the standard application process for accessing data sets for developing evidence.

### Planning and Implementing

The planning process piloted during FY 2021 resulted in some lessons learned. In FY 2022, each evidence-building partner will meet separately with program office counterparts for needs sensing in addition to having a cohesive initial conversation. This will ensure that needs are surfaced in sufficient detail so as to be actionable and so that program office staff have an opportunity to develop a working relationship with their GPO, OCDO, and NCEE counterparts.

However, this means the results of needs-sensing activities must be intentionally shared among evidence-building offices to promote coordination, reduce duplication, and identify opportunities for synergies and project improvements.

The Department has identified two challenges to getting high-quality evaluation findings into the hands of decision-makers quickly: (1) improving procurement processes and (2) accelerating data collection. Progress has been made on both fronts. First, IES has launched a Project Management Office charged with identifying best practices in procurement government-wide and then promoting the use of those practices across IES. NCEE stands to benefit from that work and will share findings from its work with others in the federal evidence community. Separately, NCEE has increased its use of more flexible acquisition vehicles to reduce the time between identifying an evaluation requirement and awarding a new task order to begin work. Second, NCEE has worked with OCDO and colleagues in OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs to approve [a new "generic" clearance](#) for design studies, field tests, and exploratory data collections. This clearance will allow NCEE to begin some types of information collection more rapidly, reducing the time between instrument development and data analysis.

The Department continues to struggle with uneven resources to execute against its full evidence-building agenda. This affects efforts to conduct rigorous evaluations, use data for program improvement and policy analysis, and maximize the use of statistical data.

Both the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* make substantial resources available to NCEE to conduct rigorous program evaluations. In contrast, authorizing legislation for many of the Department's other programs include little or no dedicated evaluation funding. In recent budget proposals, the Department has signaled its belief that more resources should be dedicated to supporting evidence building in postsecondary education. This is consistent with the Department's proposed FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, in which postsecondary education represents a significant share of the Department's evidence-building needs. Should additional resources for postsecondary evaluation become available, NCEE staffing patterns will most certainly need to be adjusted in response. Because NCEE's K–12 remit is not likely to shrink, the Department will be forced to either accept a decreased level of service in the K–12 evaluation space or hire additional program evaluators with postsecondary expertise, or some combination of both.

A resource of another type—business process and performance data—hinders the Department's efforts at program improvement and policy analysis. The Department's own Inspector General has consistently challenged it to improve its data, data systems, and use of data. Similarly, research conducted by OCDO has demonstrated both office-specific and enterprise-wide gaps in data maturity. Filling these gaps is likely to require significant and systematic investments in data governance, analytic infrastructure, and experts skilled in the collection and use of education data.

The agency would greatly benefit from a single dedicated funding stream to develop, prioritize, and finance enterprise-wide data management initiatives—to include data accessibility, infrastructure, standards, linkages, and training—in support of and on behalf of each of these POCs. Not unlike the dedicated evaluation set-aside currently authorized by ESEA and recommended for programs authorized by HEA, the Department recommends identifying a



dedicated funding stream for data governance, infrastructure, and performance and policy analysis. To do so, Evidence Act officials have recommended allowing the Department to reserve and pool up to 0.25 percent of discretionary program accounts, such as those under *Every Student Succeeds Act* and HEA, to promote modernization and efficiency in enterprise data. This recommendation would expand the evidence-building capacity of the Department beyond what other existing or proposed set-asides related to evaluation can offer alone. Supported by the Department's [DGB](#) (where each Department's POC is represented, along with the Performance Improvement Officer, Evaluation Officer, SO, and Senior Agency Official for Privacy) and guided by the long-term goals and near-term objectives identified in the Department's [Data Strategy](#), these funds would be stewarded by OCDO to ensure the Department meets the requirements of Title II of the Evidence Act.

Finally, to realize the Evidence Act's vision for improving the quality and confidentiality of statistical data, modernizing the Department's approach to sharing and protecting confidential statistical data, and improving researcher access to statistical data, NCES would benefit from targeted investments of both contract and staff resources. This could include, but would not be limited to, hiring new staff members who could oversee the development of new statistical tools and methods for improving data quality and protecting confidential data; hiring staff with expertise at the nexus of information technology and statistical practice to liaise with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), OCDO, and others in the federal data and statistical systems to ensure that NCES can better ensure the protection of data collected under a pledge of confidentiality; and implementing requirements associated with a standard application process for researcher access to confidential data and/or the eventual development of a national secure data service.

## **Dissemination and Stakeholder Feedback**

IES, in particular, has taken steps to make its products more engaging and consumable by an informed lay audience. However, work remains to determine whether these or other actions by the Department have translated to increased dissemination and, more importantly, greater use of research evidence (URE) by internal and external stakeholders. URE is a function of several factors, including timeliness, relevance, usability, and contextual factors, that can serve as supports or barriers to the use of evidence in policymaking and practice. Despite its importance, the Department has yet to invest in a systematic investigation of its own URE and how it might be improved. Should resources become available, Department evidence-building partners should prioritize this work to maximize their impact.



## Section 6: Extent to Which Evaluation and Evidence-Use Capacity is Present

<b>Relevant Law(s):</b>	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(F) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
<b>Relevant Statutory Language:</b>	“... the extent to which the agency has the capacity to assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations.”

The Department conducted two Department-wide Data and Evidence Use Surveys—one in FY 2020 and one in FY 2021. The Evidence Use component of the survey was left unchanged between the two iterations to promote longitudinal analysis. Key findings across the FY 2020 and FY 2021 surveys include the following:

- The proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to the development of performance measures increased by 5 percentage points. The FY 2021 result is approximately 76 percent.
- There was a slight decline in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to the analysis of performance measures, from about 67 percent in FY 2020 to 65 percent in FY 2021.
- There was a very slight decline in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to explaining and applying Department evidence standards to grantees, from about 63 percent to 62 percent. This result is despite efforts to increase staff awareness of evidence standards. In February 2021, IES’ What Works Clearinghouse team released a new training video explaining its ratings and how to use the clearinghouse to determine whether a listed policy, practice, or program has evidence of effectiveness.
- There was a very minor increase in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to supervisor support for a culture of evidence use in their unit, from about 80 percent to 81 percent.
- There was a decline in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to having a clear understanding of the Department’s Strategic Goals, from 70 percent to 60 percent. Although more information is needed, a likely explanation for this finding is that at the time the FY 2021 survey was being administered, the Department was in the process of developing a new set of Strategic Goals and strategic objectives. The Department will monitor this estimate in FY 2022 and develop relevant learning opportunities for internal and external colleagues.

### Other Capacity-Building Activities

Highlights of FY 2021 Department activities to support staff capacity to more effectively build and use evidence are as follows:

- The Department offers “Evidence 101” to all new Department staff, which provides a broad overview of the Department’s definition of evidence, how evidence is used across the Department’s program, key features of the Evidence Act, and concepts related to evidence building.

- Based on emergent evidence observed during the implementation of recent recovery legislation (e.g., *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*), there may be substantial confusion about the Department’s evidence levels as well as the statutory and regulatory meaning of “evidence-based.” GPO and NCEE are developing resources for internal and external audiences that provide additional guidance on the Department’s evidence standards and how they are to be used.
- The Department is developing a logic model template with instructions for use. To complement the template, a logic model scoring rubric, designed to distinguish higher-quality logic models from lower-quality ones, is being refined for use across the Department.
- To support Department staff in more effectively monitoring how grantees are using evidence in the design and operation of their programs, the Department has developed a new section of the standard grantee annual performance report. The new reporting elements ask grantees to identify the evidence-based components of their projects; document those components’ implementation, including challenges and successes; detail changes in implementation plans related to evidence-based practices; and report on outputs and outcomes specifically associated with those practices. In addition to providing an opportunity for grantees to reflect upon their practice and document material changes relevant to monitoring the grant, it provides a structured protocol for grant monitors to use during conversations with grantees about their work, use of evidence, and efforts at continuous improvement.
- OCIO and OCDO partnered to begin development of a low-cost, in-depth data science training program modeled after the pilot administered by the Federal Chief Information Officers Council in 2020.

## **Addressing Data Literacy**

One of the most significant activities undertaken during FY 2021 to advance the Department’s capacity to build and use evidence was the inauguration of the Department’s Data Literacy Program. This project, led by OCDO, is a collaboration between OCDO, IES, and the Office of Human Resources. The program begins with Data Literacy 101 and includes multiple courses in four domains—analytical foundations, communicating with data, data and evidence foundations (which includes Evidence 101), and decision-making with data—with recommended learning paths based on personas that staff members can adopt. As of August 2021, the Department had recruited 12 data literacy ambassadors to assist OCDO in customizing introductory data literacy trainings for their specific principal offices and then co-teach the customized courses with OCDO or IES staff. Over time, it is hoped that the program can be augmented with evidence literacy and statistical literacy content to further develop staff capacity to build and use evidence to improve agency operations. All Data Literacy Program resources are housed on the Department’s *connectED* intranet and are available to all Department staff.

# Appendix D. Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
AIVRS	American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services
APG	Agency Priority Goal
ARP	<i>American Rescue Plan Act of 2021</i>
BS	Budget Service
CCD	Common Core of Data
CRDC	Civil Rights Data Collection
CTE	Career and Technical Education
DEIA	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
DGB	Data Governance Board
DRB	Disclosure Review Board
Ed.D.	Doctor of Education
EED	Effective Educator Development
EIR	Education Innovation and Research
EIS	Early Identification System
EL	English Learner
EO	Executive Order
ESEA	<i>Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965</i>
ESF	Education Stabilization Fund
ESSER	Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
FAFSA®	<i>Free Application for Federal Student Aid®</i>
FSA	Federal Student Aid
FTE	Full-Time Employee
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GEAR UP	Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs
GPO	Grants Policy Office
GPRAMA	<i>Government Performance and Results Act and Modernization Act of 2010</i>
GS	General Schedule
HEA	<i>Higher Education Act of 1965</i>
HEERF	Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund
IDEA	<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</i>
IES	Institute of Education Sciences
IHE	Institution of Higher Education
IT	Information Technology
K–12	Kindergarten Through Grade 12
LEA	Local Educational Agency
MPP	Master of Public Policy
NAEP	National Assessment of Education Progress
NCEE	National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

Acronym	Definition
NCER	National Center for Education Research
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NCSER	National Center for Special Education Research
NPSAS	National Postsecondary Student Aid Study
NTPS	National Teacher and Principal Survey
OCDO	Office of the Chief Data Officer
OCIO	Office of the Chief information Officer
OCR	Office for Civil Rights
OCTAE	Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education
OELA	Office of English Language Acquisition
OESE	Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
OGC	Office of the General Counsel
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPE	Office of Postsecondary Education
OPEPD	Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
P-12	Prekindergarten Through Grade 12
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
PLQ	Priority Learning Question
POC	Principal Operating Component
PSLF	Public Service Loan Forgiveness
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
RUD	Restricted-Use Data
SEA	State Educational Agency
SEED	Supporting Effective Educator Development
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SO	Statistical Official
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TEACH	Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education
TSL	Teacher and Student Leader
URE	Use of Research Evidence
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
WSF	Weighted Student Funding

# Appendix E. Glossary of Definitions

The following definitions are from the *Federal Register's* [\*Final Priorities and Definitions—Secretary's Supplemental Priorities and Definitions for Discretionary Grants Programs\*](#).

**Children or students with disabilities:** Children with disabilities as defined in section 602(3) of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. 1401(3)) and 34 CFR 300.8, or students with disabilities, as defined in the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (29 U.S.C. 705(37)(B)).

**Community college:** “Junior or community college” as defined in section 312(f) of the *Higher Education Act of 1965*, as amended (HEA).

**Culturally and linguistically inclusive:** Pedagogical practices that address inequities in access to and success in school by recognizing and valuing all students’ identities, cultures, and potential.

**Early learning:** Any (a) state-licensed or state-regulated program or provider, regardless of setting or funding source, that provides early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry, including, but not limited to, any program operated by a child care center or in a family child care home; (b) program funded by the federal government or state or local educational agencies (including any IDEA-funded program); (c) Early Head Start and Head Start program; (d) nonrelative child care provider who is not otherwise regulated by the state and who regularly cares for two or more unrelated children for a fee in a provider setting; and (e) other program that may deliver early learning and development services in a child’s home, such as the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Early Head Start; and Part C of IDEA.

**Educator:** An individual who is an early learning educator, teacher, principal or other school leader, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, school social worker, early intervention service personnel), paraprofessional, or faculty.

**English learner:** An individual who is an English learner as defined in section 8101(20) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended, or an individual who is an English language learner as defined in section 203(7) of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*.

**Evidence-based:** The meaning is ascribed in 34 CFR 77.1 or ESEA, as applicable.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities:** Colleges and universities that meet the criteria set out in 34 CFR 608.2.

**Minority-Serving Institution:** An institution that is eligible to receive assistance under sections 316 through 320 of Part A of Title III, under Part B of Title III, or under Title V of HEA.

**Tribal College or University:** The meaning is ascribed in section 316(b)(3) of HEA.

**Underserved student:** A student (which may include children in early learning environments, students in kindergarten through grade 12 programs, students in postsecondary education or career and technical education, and adult learners, as appropriate) in one or more of the following subgroups: (a) a student who is living in poverty or is served by schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty; (b) a student of color; (c) a student who is a member of a federal or state recognized Indian Tribe; (d) an English learner; (e) a child or student with a disability; (f) a disconnected youth; (g) a technologically unconnected youth; (h) a migrant student; (i) a student experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity; (j) a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, or intersex (LGBTQ+) student; (k) a student who is in foster care; (l) a student without documentation of immigration status; (m) a pregnant, parenting, or caregiving student; (n) a student impacted by the justice system, including a formerly incarcerated student; (o) a student who is the first in their family to attend postsecondary education; (p) a student enrolling in or seeking to enroll in postsecondary education for the first time at the age of 20 or older; (q) a student who is working full time while enrolled in postsecondary education; (r) a student who is enrolled in or is seeking to enroll in postsecondary education who is eligible for a Pell Grant; (s) an adult student in need of improving their basic skills or an adult student with limited English proficiency; (t) a student performing significantly below grade level; or (u) a military- or veteran-connected student.



U.S. Department of Education  
Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.  
Secretary

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